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JULY 1954

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D. MONDRONE

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# THE STORY OF ALESSANDRA

*Based on an article by*

D. MONDRONE

THE MARCHESA ALESSANDRA was, not so long ago, the theme of much graceless gossip. Then the talk about her died down. One might come across her name in memoirs and appreciations of Gabriele d'Annunzio, with vague references to her retirement after her association with him. Nor did the Abbé Gorel's reminiscences<sup>1</sup> raise more than a ripple of interest. It is only now, after thirty years of silence, that curiosity about her has begun to revive, as the wildness of her life in the early years of this century is contrasted with its amazing sequel. Her story is recalled in occasional magazine articles or in such religious conferences as find their way into print. We have even come across hints, dropped, be it said, somewhat prematurely, of the introduction of a canonical process which may some day display this famous sinner in the glittering rays of Bernini's *Gloria*.

It is not easy to account for this long silence about her. Ten years before the publication of the Abbé Gorel's *Souvenirs* there appeared an anonymous biography<sup>2</sup> of the Foundress and first Prioress of the Carmel at Paray-le-Monial. Though this work revealed remarkable literary gifts and was well received in France (and also, in translation, in Italy), no one seems to have suspected that the talented author was one who had for so many years been the sensation and scandal of society. What is far more puzzling is the failure of the Abbé Gorel's memoirs to excite attention. He had acted as the Marchesa's chaplain at Garda for three years, and as tutor for her two sons on holiday from their school at Mondragone. His book was ready for the press as

<sup>1</sup> *Marquise et Carmélite. Souvenirs d'un Aumonier*, by Abbé Gaston Gorel. Paris, Tequi, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> *Mère Marie de Jésus, fondatrice et prieure du Carmel de Paray-le-Monial* (1853-1917). Paray, 1921.

early as March 1926—but it had to be held back. On the death of Alessandra in 1931, two further chapters were added. It seems pretty clear that the Abbé felt unable to make use of details which had come to his knowledge in confidence, while the Marchesa was still alive. This too may account for its otherwise inexplicable lacunae. Yet his compressed memoir of 250 pages makes indispensable reading for any who may wish to follow up this story, for which, in its completeness, we have had to wait till our Marian year of 1954.

It was in the stifling heats of last August that we received<sup>1</sup> a manuscript of four hundred closely-written pages with a plea to read it at once. One must confess that the onset of the dog-days, weariness of the flesh and preparations for the summer holiday more than suggested postponement. Yet *Three white veils*<sup>2</sup> provoked curiosity and, once one began to read, it was impossible to call a halt. Here was the kind of "life" we writers dream of: close-knit, gripping attention, rich in colourful scenes and startling associations—all set out with a fine sense of style; and, best of all, the story was penetratingly and profoundly spiritual. That is how we made the acquaintance of a writer who took to writing simply because she felt driven to express herself through another exceptionally vivid and complex personality. In interpreting the life of this self-willed girl who admitted no restraint in her passionate course and yet ended by surrendering herself so wholly to the working of God's grace, how easy and tempting it must have been to contrast the lights and the shadows with that realism and frankness with which we are all too familiar! We are grateful to have been spared any such exhibitionism. No violence is done anywhere to a tale of violent contrasts. Lucy Napoli Prario has not overlooked any available writings or possible sources of information. She has visited all the places in which the Marchesa lived, followed her journeys like a pilgrim, and made a prolonged sojourn at the Carmel in which under the name of Mother Mary of Jesus the ex-Marchesa spent the better part of her life.

When you have read this story you are left thinking. Every conversion is a mystery of grace; but in this conversion of the

<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to the office of the *Civiltà Cattolica* in Rome.

<sup>2</sup> *Tre abiti bianchi per Alessandra*, by Lucy Napoli Prario. Mondadori, Milano, 1954.

Marchesa Alessandra, as in that of St. Margaret of Cortona, one is faced with the open conflict between human freedom and the predilection of God's choice. How does He shape and bend the recalcitrant will to His mastery without nullifying or at least impairing the soul's freedom? In his life of St. Margaret, Mauriac explicitly declares: "She did wrong knowing herself, in all her wrong-doing, as God's elect one, already signed with His seal!" Mauriac loves to lay stress on this predestinational element in his Saint's life. Signora Prario is less provocative in her conclusions. With her we become spectators of a protracted spiritual campaign in which the seemingly impregnable defences of Alessandra's obstinacy have to be reduced one by one, before the Divine Lover can effect His entry into her capital city.

The story (under its title of *Three white veils*) opens in May 1887. We see little Alessandra clad in white from head to foot, making her first Communion with her school-companions in the convent chapel of the Sacred Heart nuns at the Trinità dei Monti, in Rome. Incidentally, one wonders how much attention should be paid to what children may say, in so highly emotional a context. Anyhow, here is the story Alessandra confided to one trusted nun. "I don't know, Mother, how to tell you what happened to me after Communion. I am sure I went back to my place but then I got lost. I just couldn't see anything except thick clouds and in the darkest cloud of them all there was a door with these three words on it: 'Nothing, nothing, nothing!' Tell me, Mother, what did it mean? Do you thin!.. I just fell asleep and dreamt it all?" An enigmatic message to a child—if it was a message at all; but, to certain minds, the passage of the years in a tempestuous life may offer some further commentary.

We are not kept waiting to discover Alessandra in trouble. In spite of the careful preparation for her first Communion and all that the traditional experience and kindly ingenuity of the nuns could devise, this child of eleven had, in the course of her two years' stay, utterly exhausted their resources. Looking for all the world like an angel Alessandra simply would not submit to discipline in any shape or form. Her teachers had hoped to build on those qualities of high breeding and good feeling which they recognized in her French mother (daughter of Count Charles de Barral), but these counted for nothing by comparison with the ferocious pride and invincible obstinacy in which this wisp of a

girl so astonishingly resembled her father. This personage, Antonio Starabba, Marquis of Rudinì, possessor of vast estates in Sicily, immensely wealthy and holding at this time the office of President of the Council of Ministers, was not a man to be lightly antagonized. So, for the better part of two years the good nuns had gone on striving and hoping and praying for the redemption of his daughter. Now they had, one and all, to confess defeat. There was nothing for it but to request His Excellency to take her away. When he first heard of it he just laughed it off. He could not believe it. This request of theirs was even more ridiculous than their confession of failure. However, it should be a comparatively simple matter to convince the Reverend Mother that this sort of thing simply isn't done. There was an interview. The Marquise pleaded for her child. His Excellency was lavish in praise and promise; then unable to contain himself, he raged and stormed and swore that he would bring their very roof down on their heads. Incredibly, the Reverend Mother was adamant. Of course what mattered so much to Alessandra's father and touched his pride to the quick was not his child's perversities, but the humiliation of having to submit to her expulsion from Rome's most fashionable convent as if she were some nobody's child! In the end he decided to hush the matter up, by carrying off the cheerfully unrepentant creature to Sicily well away from the war-zone.

Here she now had all the freedom she wanted. Her loveliness enslaved the household. Every wish of hers was a command. She took to riding-breeches, preferred to be dressed as a boy, rode over the vast estate on her ponies, lived for the horses and hounds and hunting and shooting, was worshipped and spoiled by everybody. In summer she joined the rest of the family at their castle in Piedmont to follow the gay round of picnics and big hunts and grand parties, mingling with the great ones of the land and the young princes of the royal family. The summer over, her education had to be resumed. No more nuns for her. The disgruntled Marquis, instead, chose for her the ultra-modern secular school at Poggio Imperiale near Florence. She stayed in it till her sixteenth year, invariably at the top of her class, enjoying the benefits of an up-to-date teaching inspired by the ideals of "self-expression" and "free discipline," and free from any encumbrances of religious practice and prayer, till she became—



small blame to her—the completely emancipated product of our progressive age. In later years she recalled a few rare occasions when she had felt spiritually lonely and abandoned and had cried herself to sleep because she no longer belonged to Jesus and Mary and had nowhere to turn to for refuge and support. But she soon grew out of this.

Once she had left school the time had come for her to see the world and make the most of it. She accompanied her over-indulgent father wherever his duties took him, making lengthy stays at different times in France, England, Poland, Austria, Hungary and Russia, enjoying the hospitality and state of the chief embassies, loving the round of receptions and parties and dances and, best of all, the admiration excited by her dazzling beauty. Nor could she check the early stirrings of an impulsive and passionate nature even when she recoiled before the ardour of countless suitors.

Nevertheless the intensity of the social round exacted its toll, leaving her tired out and disgusted and at times strangely aware of her spiritual bankruptcy. To say that prayer had been swept out of her life and that she had now for years given up God does not mean that all she had learnt in her childhood's days was completely lost and forgotten, or that God no longer, in His mysterious ways, held on to her. She faithfully kept some sort of vow she had made, never to refuse a beggar, and never to give less than two lire. . . . Her cup of cold water. . . . Then there was that blazing row with her father. She had known all along that his ambitious hopes for her might be hard to reconcile with her own romantic dreams. With marriage in the air, here now was a wonderful offer: none less than the Grand Duke Sergius! Her father could hardly contain his delight. "Of course," as he explained to her, "this would mean some purely conventional adherence to the Orthodox Church, but surely. . . ." Her horrified reaction astonished him. He had been too hasty. He would bide his time. He could bring other influences to bear on her. . . . She saw through every ruse. When at last this conflict of wills came to a head, she proved his match, charging him in her fury with the loss of her faith, religion, God. . . . "but be sure of this: the faith I have lost I'll never abjure—no, not for the crown of an Empress!"

Alessandra had turned eighteen. She had no objection to marriage as such, realizing that it was henceforth in marriage



that her security lay. Only let it be a marriage with the man of her choice. Her choice fell, soon enough, on the young, cultured and wealthy Marquis Carlotti di Garda. This time the stars ran favourably in their courses. In October 1894, Alessandra in her bridal veil (the second of the *Three white veils*) plighted her troth, while society acclaimed this marriage of the year with its romantic matching of youthful beauty and family fortunes. There followed a grand wedding-tour through most of the countries of Europe and a final return after many months from the Isles of Greece to the Villa Carlotti and its responsibilities. Marcello, devoted as he was, did not quite measure up to Alessandra's high expectations—he lacked spontaneity. She could not dispel that shyness of his, that dark determination to keep his secret self enclosed. He grew more absorbed in his books. He loved to be left alone for long hours in his study. From the beginning Alessandra had known how deliberately and completely Marcello had, like her, given up his childhood's faith. Yet in their years of married life—little guessing how soon these would end—they had more than their share of happiness. There were two children, Antonio and Andrea, to engage her affectionate care and bless the home. All promised well till Marcello, never too robust, had an attack of pleurisy. Recovery was abnormally slow. Then, with horror, came the diagnosis of tuberculosis in its most virulent form. The best specialists were called in. Every human means was tried—and failed. Marcello grew daily weaker. Death brought its release in the early spring of 1900. He died, sadly enough, without God—finding his comfort in the tenets of his loved, pagan poets who knew no hope but bowed so nobly to fate. To the devoted Alessandra at his bedside he would murmur snatches of Horace:

Eheu, fugaces, Postume, Postume . . .

The years fleeting by and all lost to me, lost to me!

And the final, whispered farewell:

Linquenda tellus et domus et placens—uxor;

to serve as the commendation of his phantom soul into fictitious hands! Never could she forget how, in those last hours, she had accepted the dry-eyed role of a "Mother of the Gracchi," and how, in her desperate anguish, not one word of prayer had

trembled on her lips. But this story, as she told it, does her less than justice. We now know that in these last days she had turned to a well-known priest at Verona, Don Francesco Serenelli and had begged his help. Moreover a letter just received adds the evidence of the parish registers at Garda to show that at the end (*all'ultimo momento*) the Marquis Marcello Carlotti received the Sacraments. Indeed the inclusion of her hitherto-unpublished correspondence with him and (at a later stage) with the Abbé Gorel and, at the other extreme, with her lover, Gabriele d'Annunzio, lends a new significance to this amazing biography.

She had prayed that God, if God there was, would give her back her faith. It was a prayer in the void. How was that void now to be filled? To surrender to the demoded conventions of widowhood was out of the question. What perhaps held promise of relief would be a complete break-away from her surroundings. So she set out, escorted by a devoted coachman, on a drive through the Italian Riviera and the unfrequented villages of the Midi, till she could finally join forces with her friend, Miss Evelyn, at San Sebastian. Together, they wandered through Spain, crossed over into Morocco and, hiring camels and drivers, launched out into the desert. On one occasion it was only her courage and resource that saved both of them from robbery or worse. On another occasion, in the utter stillness of a starlit night she had an overwhelming experience of the Reality of God, and begged Him with every fibre of her being to give her back her belief in Christ and His Church. "When, my God, I can say once more: 'I do believe,' I vow that I'll give you myself and all that is dear to me. I swear that I shall hold back nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing." Her hunger to find out what the future held for her led her to the remote sanctuary of a venerated marabout. He knew all about her, needless to say, though she had taken care to come unannounced. "You are an Italian," he said to her. "You are too young to be going about like this. You've lost your husband. Now you are seeking. What can you hope to find? There's too much foulness within you for you to see into your heart; too much noise in your head for you to hear. Don't look! Don't listen! . . . You want God? That is good. Keep to your own religion. You want to know what's coming to you? Beauty, love . . . pain, poverty, cold . . . bitter cold . . . a high mountain, all white, all dazzlingly white." What could

such a message mean? Was he an impostor or a seer? Alessandra thought it over—dismissed the vague mystifications, but couldn't help recalling that doorway in the clouds on her first Communion morning and the words: "Nothing, nothing, nothing."

Back at Garda after her travels she plunged into an exacting course of study. If she was independently to make up her mind about God and man she needed more than her smattering of Latin, Greek and German. She must be able to read the authorities in the original—the Gospels and St. Augustine and the *Summa*—and find out what modern critics like Baur, Strauss and Harnack had to say about it all. The programme did not lack ambition, but her suspicions that she was crying for the moon in looking for a rationalized faith grew daily stronger. At last, after arguing it all out with her school-friend Elsa di Sant' Elia in a hotel at Verona, she decided to submit and become a little child again. Very humbly, next morning she went to Confession and Communion. In her prayers she recalled that vow of hers made in the desert under the stars: but, she did not yet quite feel up to any sudden and complete renunciation. No doubt all would come to pass some day. She must wait till her hour struck. Then God would see to it. He did!—by permitting Alessandra to take the worst toss in her whole life. She became intimate with that errant genius, Gabriele d'Annunzio.

Our author, Signora Prario, might excusably have erred by excess or defect in her handling of this scandalous period. Yet while her account of it is lit up by flashes of humour and an impish appreciation of the tempestuous conflicts of these lovers, amid absurdities and extravagances that flouted all convention, she manages to tell it all with a charming discernment. Her delicacy and lightness of touch never fail. Not once does she yield to the temptations of "realism" or overstep the bounds of reticence and good taste. We follow the posturings of the poet as he plays the seductive part of the Serpent yet fails to beguile this very authentic daughter of Eve. The young widow is attracted, not to say bewitched; yet she can round on him, if only to show that he is not going to have his way with her, just as he pleases. "No, no, my dear Maestro, I don't want to be the fuel for your furnace; I don't want to be your 'grand amour.' I don't want to lull your soul to sleep with the soothing lilt of my lullabies. I am no nightingale. What I love are horses and hounds

and the chase and anything to make you see that not all women are rabbits cowering before the onset of the weasel. I am as I am. Let me be! Do you think I am going to swoon away in your arms, sighing 'You're my destiny'? I challenge all your forcefulness to bring me to heel!" This was all very fine!—but Alessandra's assurance proved her undoing. In her delirious passion she soon lost all sense of decency, and threw discretion to the winds. She just laughed at her brother's remonstrances and readiness to defend his sister's honour. She faced her infuriated father with the cry: "A chacun sa vie! You've forgotten that I am *your* daughter!" She proved a godsend to the scavengers of the Press, those "peeping Toms"—who so assiduously serve their social clientèle with tasty bits of scandal. Far from bowing before the storm of indignation she bestrode it. "Let the pious, old frumps hold up their hands in horror if they can't hold their tongues!"

Installed at Capponcina with her lover and rejoicing in her pet name of Nikê she plunged into a course of Oriental extravagance, engaged an army of liveried servants, introduced a pack of hounds into her kennels, put up sumptuous stalls for her horses, even provided Persian rugs for her Arab steeds to lie on! Money flowed like water. As whim or fancy seized her she would decamp from Capponcina to Garda, from Garda to Mondragone to see her delicate boys, and incidentally, to give the good Jesuit Rector there a bit of a headache! Apart from such respites, there were lengthy and repeated sojourns with the poet at Marina di Pisa. All the time she was eaten up with jealousy, brooking no rivals, sparing no ruse or wile to keep her hold on her "faithless Paris." Then, one fine day, at Capponcina, consternation overwhelmed her tried but devoted household. "Nikê," the unconquerable, was laid low! Professor Pestolozza, a leading gynaecologist, had to operate on her almost at once. It was a question of life and death. A second and then a third operation was required. Few believed Alessandra could possibly survive, but God had His ways and plans for her, and this was their first unfolding. In her utter prostration she asked for a priest. He refused to come. She asked for another priest. He too refused. It looks as if they felt that to approach such a bedside, in its notorious setting, would have been an insupportable scandal. This decision (whatever we may think of it) made her think.

Indeed as the danger of death passed away and the slow process of recovery began there was time and food for thought. Physically she was now no more than a shadow of her former self. Her squander-mania had landed her into bankruptcy. She had to endure the disgrace of bailiffs in the house and enforced sales and public auctions, with all their intriguing revelations. Needless to say her "faithless Paris" had long since slipped away to find his consolations elsewhere. Early in 1907 she was at last well enough to leave Capponcina and its ravaged glories, and return to her less tainted Villa Carlotti di Garda.

The substance of Alessandra's life up to this stage had been only too well known; what however had remained hidden was its sequel, which makes it so like that of St. Margaret of Cortona. While Margaret was enjoying the favours of a lordling of Montepulciano, Mauriac tells us how her rivals tried to claw her: "You've brought it off, Margaret! You've got what you wanted! But can't you see what's in store for you? The gruesome old age of a discarded harlot!" Unabashed, Margaret retorted: "Nothing of the sort, my dears. When it's all over you'll all be coming to pray over the grave of a saint, for that's what I am meant to become and mean to be!" Whatever Mauriac's evidence for this prophetic utterance, Signora Prario gives us chapter and verse for this incident at Capponcina. Alessandra, in a heart-to-heart talk with her cousin Livia had dropped the remark: "Of course, we know it can't go on like this. One fine day I'll have to go off to be a Carmelite." Livia took it as a joke and naturally burst out laughing. Here indeed, with Gabriele to give the finishing touches, was a Reverend Mother in the making! But Alessandra would see no joke in it, and protested that she meant what she said: "You'll see, my dear Livia, you'll see. It will be as I say. Carmel is the place for me!"

To the researches of Signora Prario in what has so obviously been a labour of love, we owe our knowledge of Alessandra's further story. She returned to Garda in 1907, entered Carmel in 1911, died in 1931. It is not easy to explain why, through all these years, her sisters in religion have taken no steps to commemorate their venerated Mother. One would think that, quite apart from their gratitude for all she had been to them and done for them, they would have felt compelled to proclaim this miracle of Mercy and to tell how Our Lord had so lavishly



bestowed on a woman who was a sinner "the riches of the glory of His grace."

With her gradual convalescence at Garda, Alessandra entered on a new life. Her past had been demolished and lay in ruins around her. Slowly and painfully she now had to take up the work of reconstruction. She had the goodwill, the desire to believe, but by no effort could she overcome her repugnance to the complete surrender of faith. Yet paradoxically, even while she declared that she couldn't believe in God she grew ever more aware of a pressure on her soul, a longing to be able to pray, the sense of a Power too near to be seen, too close to be silenced, soliciting her to yield without reserve. She renewed her contact with Don Serenelli who had helped her in the past. In the summer of 1909 the Abbé Gaston Gorel was engaged to act as Chaplain to the household and tutor for her little sons when at home from Mondragone. He too did his best to advise and direct the lady of the house but the spirit of rationalism that dominated her soul defeated all his efforts. He saw, as we all see sooner or later, that there is a stage in which argument defeats itself and serves to enthrone rather than to exorcise the fiend of doubt. He fell back at last on a very simple prescription—a pilgrimage to Lourdes. And it was at Lourdes that her goodwill was rewarded and faith gushed up like a fountain and flooded her soul.

There were to be no further turning-points in a life so full of turns and twists. Back at Garda she at once put herself in training. She studied the ways of prayer, familiarized herself with the treasures of the Church's liturgy, recited the divine office, steeped herself in the writings of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross and under guidance adopted Carmelite practices of fasting and penance. Early in 1911 she was allowed to take a private vow of chastity. And now things moved on even faster. For some time letters had been passing between Villa Carlotti and the Carmel at Paray-le-Monial. The replies had grown ever more definite and encouraging. She went and paid a visit. All was fixed up. The parish priest at Garda, was shocked into prophecy by the startling rapidity of it all. "Our good Marchesa will end up in a lunatic asylum if she doesn't end up as a saint!"

Naturally, her departure from the great house could not pass unnoticed, and as she had kept her own counsel and done nothing to appease curiosity all sorts of rumours about her once more

ran the rounds. No echo of them could reach her ears. She was where she wished to be. She could now respond to her Lord and Master in the unbroken silence and security of the cloister. Before her entry, she had exacted a promise that no special consideration or exemption of any kind would be granted to her. Of course she could never hope to make up for such a past, but one joyous hope was left: that of yielding herself without check to a life of total expiation. She begged leave to make her noviciate more than normally penitential, and was, perhaps imprudently, allowed to do so.

Her ceaseless prayer to Our Lord was that, what she herself could not part with, He Himself would forcibly take away! There are times when some of us too utter such prayers. How much do we mean them? She did! Our Lord took her at her word. A letter from Mondragone broke the sad news that her Andrea was stricken by tuberculosis. A mother's duty prevails over every cloistral obligation. Sister Mary of Jesus had perforce to don lay garb and go to her son. She took him from Mondragone, installed him in the best Swiss clinic, did all she could to save him. But the haemorrhages could not be checked and all too soon she saw him to the grave. Then, back once more at Paray-le-Monial, she was, on the feast of St. Paul's conversion, clothed with the white veil (her third and last), this bridal dress being replaced during the ceremony by the coarse brown habit of Carmel. A few months passed by. Then came another letter to tell her that the inherited taint had now caught Antonio, her first-born. Again, no expense or effort was spared. She sat and wept and smiled and prayed by his bedside, and closed his eyes in death. And so, for a second time, back she came to Carmel, to be the willing victim of the boundless goodwill!

The slick judgment of worldly wisdom might urge some other tendency—psychopathic, escapist, morbidly-introverted—as the key to such a life, and the natural explanation of this burial of her talents in the cloister. But, though one admits that no banalities are more sickening than those with which edifying books are too often larded, it really is the acme of foolishness to talk, as people *will* talk, of burial in Carmel! A Carmel is not a cemetery! Nowhere on earth does the vibrant radiance of grace so transcendently surpass the irrelevance of the grave. It should be no surprise to us to find that the talents of Mother Mary of



Jesus were not buried in her Carmel. Hardly had she taken the solemn vows of profession before she was appointed Mistress of Novices—"to be hung up like a lamp on a bracket for passers-by." So she said, little guessing that her lamp would shed its rays far beyond her little Carmel and go on shining ever more brightly.

On the death of the Prioress she was unanimously elected to take her place. Perhaps it was an obvious choice. It proved a happy one. The convent entered on an era of unprecedented prosperity.

Within two years a missing half was added to the building to make it structurally complete. The impalpable influence of the Convent began to spread. Vocations multiplied. A new Carmel soon had to be opened at Valenciennes, and again another at Montmartre in Paris. Then came the offer of the abandoned Charterhouse of Le Reposoir in the mountains of Upper Savoy. One wonders whether this offer reminded her of what the old marabout in Morocco had said about a mountain "all white, dazzlingly white." She could, at least, go and see. Though in no state to travel, off she set like another St. Teresa, to examine its possibilities. Hardly had she got there than she collapsed. An operation might save her. She calmly consented. Another operation as fruitlessly followed. All had to be sacrifice to the end, for here she lay in a Genevan hospital, sent forth under "an obedience" from the cherished enclosure, parted from her well-loved sisters, dying alone. She had sinned much and loved much; and it was with much love that she yielded her soul to God at daybreak on 2 January 1931. A faithful attendant took down her last message to those who were always first in her thoughts.

"This life is seen for the empty sham it is when we are leaving it to go to God. The closer we draw to eternal life the more we see how cheap and pitiful all else is. My dear, dear Sisters, for us there is no one but Jesus Christ: no one else, nothing else! In His Love alone is Truth and Life."

[Translated and adapted from 'La Civiltà Cattolica' by L. E. Bellanti.]

# THE CIRCLE AND THE TANGENT

*An Interpretation of Mr. Waugh's 'Men at Arms'*

By

FREDERICK J. STOPP

*The algebra of fiction must reduce its problems to symbols if they are to be soluble at all.—John Plant in 'Work Suspended.'*

ANY ATTEMPT to comment critically on the first volume of a trilogy may well court the double danger of irrelevance and impertinence. But in writing on *Men at Arms* the critic may fortify himself with the publisher's announcement that each of the three novels may be regarded as complete in itself and may urge in his defence the unity given to this, the first volume, by the figure of Aphorpe, whose rise, decline and sacrifice provide Mr. Waugh with one of those tripartite divisions of plot which he has often favoured: Book One, "Aphorpe Gloriosus," Book Two, "Aphorpe Furibundus," Book Three, "Aphorpe Immolatus."

This stark simplicity of the list of contents, with its almost complete eclipse of the nominal hero, Guy Crouchback, after the "Prologue," an inference rather confirmed than otherwise by a first reading of the book, suggests the view that this grotesque character and his counterpart in the General Officer class, Brigadier Ritchie-Hook, who between them in Book Two engage in the uproarious Battle of the Thunder-Box, have stolen the volume from the legitimate central figure. But the retrospective account of the hero's family and earlier life which brings the reader to the threshold of the action proper, shows that Guy Crouchback is in no position to become the bearer of an immediate external action. For eight years, since Virginia's defection, he has been maimed by life, and has shrunk more and more

"into his own dry, empty place." Deprived of love, not *simpatico* with his fellow-men in Santa Dulcina delle Rocce, deprived by the omnipresence of Fascism of those political loyalties which might have sustained him, possessed of only a few, dry grains of faith, "all his spiritual faculties were just perceptibly impaired." His brother Ivo's death, stark mad, in 1931, "sometimes seemed to Guy a horrible caricature of his own life, which at just that time was plunged in disaster."

All that had happened was that, "set apart from his fellows by his own deep wound, that unstaunched, internal draining away of life and love," Guy had fostered in himself the substitute life of the dreamer, in which "sometimes he imagined himself serving the last Mass for the last Pope in a catacomb at the end of the world," and through which he felt an especial kinship for Roger of Waybroke, Knight, an Englishman and would-be Crusader, who had stolen the honours of patron saint of the town from the more official but less exciting Santa Dulcina. Roger, like Guy, was "a man with a great journey still all before him and a great vow unfulfilled," and the immediate effect of the outbreak of war was to provide Guy, the modern romantic crusader, with a goal and an incentive, but no more. The goal was the defeat of the enemy, who now stood out at last, "plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off . . . the Modern Age in arms." The incentive was his long "frustrated love," which had now "found its first satisfaction."

It is not uncommon for Mr. Waugh to depict the romantic visionary: such was Boot, the foreign correspondent in darkest Ishmaelia (*Scoop*). Nor to see the Modern Age as the enemy: such was Neutralia, Mr. Scott-King's "Modern Europe." But for the romantic visionary to meet the modern age, not within the covers of an extravaganza, but against the real setting of the Second World War, the hero must undergo a process of acclimatization, during which friend and foe will behave in the exaggerated manner of shadows thrown more than life-size on the retina of the inward eye—in fact in the manner of Apthorpe and Ritchie-Hook. Guy's fantasies have a "last-minute" quality—serving the last Mass for the last Pope, Congreve saving Truslove at the eleventh hour from an awful death; these are scenes like the spectacular, cinematographic consummation, with Bengal Lancers, kilted Highlanders and the like, devoutly desired by

William Boot. And for such consummation, Mr. Waugh has allowed himself three volumes.

In the meantime the apparently passive Crouchback is wrestling with creatures which are partly the figments of his own imagination; that is, the internal and external planes of the action run parallel. Ritchie-Hook receives the projection of all Crouchback's compensatory romanticism, he is the adventurer and figure of irrepressible vital force, a distant descendant of Captain Grimes in *Decline and Fall*, the Captain Truslove of Guy's youthful reading, cast for the role of being rescued by his companion Congreve-Crouchback when all appears lost. Apthorpe receives the projection of all the lamed Crouchback's desired contacts with his fellow men at arms; he is the inner compensation of a person who has always known himself to be non-*simpatico*; he is, in fact, like that earlier character Atwater, in *Work Suspended*, fundamentally the personification of the "Good-Scout." So these two represent contrasted embodiments of the ideal of the "man at arms," and the dispossession of Apthorpe by Ritchie-Hook in Crouchback's loyalties is the main theme of the book. Here is action enough proceeding deep below the numbed surface of the hero's soul.

Not that Apthorpe should simply be equated with Atwater, any more than Crouchback is just another John Plant. Atwater was a man, if man is the proper word, of many conflicting moods. "Atwater the dreamer, Atwater the good scout, and Atwater the underdog seemed to appear in more or less regular sequence." But Crouchback has spent eight years in the spiritual desert which Plant was only just entering. So Crouchback has assumed the role of the dreamer, while the underdog is played by the Trimmers, Leonards and Sarum-Smiths of the later work. And Atwater, stripped of some of his many conflicting moods, and in whom, ultimately, "the Good-Scout predominated," is reborn as Apthorpe, fortified to bestride the action of the first volume, a Colossus though with feet of clay, while Crouchback treads the longer and stonier way of self-integration.

The feet of clay are of course not immediately obvious. Of the batch of young officers who joined the Halberdiers with Crouchback, "Apthorpe alone looked like a soldier"; he alone, primed with a rich vocabulary of military terms and abbreviations, "was marked for early promotion"—a promotion for

which he has already supplied himself liberally with pips. A sketch of his outward appearance could only be an impressionistic caricature of the typical soldier: tin-hat, moustache, pips, respirator and boots ("porpoises"), and a brandished signal-pad, but with no flesh and blood behind it. He is, in fact, as is suggested by the title of Book One, a modern type of the "Miles Gloriosus."

Crouchback is at first absorbed into this caricature of the good scout, "haunted by Apthorpe in the role of doppelgänger." Predestined by their similarity of age and foreign background to be thrown on each other's company, they become the "Uncles" of the squad, and frequenters in common of agreeable off-duty retreats such as the Garibaldi Restaurant and the Southsands Yacht Squadron. Needless to say, in all their strictly military exercises (such as the excursion to Mudshore rifle-range), Apthorpe initially forges ahead of Crouchback. But Crouchback has engaged battle from the moment almost of their first association, his main weapon in this silent struggle being the one available to the rational man over his more naïve brother: irony and superior detachment and consciousness. It is significant that, at his first meeting with Ritchie-Hook, Guy is taken for Apthorpe. Apthorpe may well bluster ("taking advantage of another chap's illness to impersonate him"), but the damage is done: the supplanter has this once been supplanted. It is moreover Crouchback, not Apthorpe, who sees immediately the humour of the situation, when both return lame from leave, and foresees that there will be laughter and clapping in the mess. Externally the fortunes of the two men alternate, and Apthorpe's success on the rifle-range and his rapid promotion are troughs for Crouchback; conversely, Crouchback's increasing recovery as military training progresses and peace-time conditions merge into active operations means the eclipse of Apthorpe ("Apthorpe's fine show of technical vocabulary fell flat. Guy spoke up clearly and concisely"). And inwardly, Crouchback is all the time gaining maturity and confidence and withdrawing the life-blood from his more flashy counterpart.

As is common in such cases, a resounding fiasco precedes and overshadows the beginning of the recovery: Guy's attempt to resolve his one civilian problem, by establishing marital relations with his former wife Virginia. This is perhaps the peak of



Apthorpe's exterior domination of Crouchback. Not only do Apthorpe's elements (a monocle and a sprouting moustache) bulk large in the motivation of Crouchback's new-found confidence, but Apthorpe's constant telephonic interruptions are a determining factor in the ultimate fiasco of what should have been a successful seduction. When the bell rings for the last time, after the rift between Guy and Virginia is painfully manifest, the following conversation takes place:

"I say, Crouchback, old man, I'm in something of a quandary. I've just put a man under close arrest."

"That's a rash thing to do."

"He's a civilian."

"Then you can't."

"That, Crouchback, is what the prisoner maintains. I hope you aren't going to take his part."

"Virginia, don't go."

"What's that? I don't get you, old man. Apthorpe here. Did you say it was 'No go'?"

Virginia went. Apthorpe continued . . . .

Can it be doubted that this conversation between Guy and his grotesque double refers in fact to Guy's attempt to place the "civilian" Virginia under "close arrest"? Apthorpe appeals to Crouchback "as an officer of His Majesty's Forces," because "I don't happen to have my King's Regulations with me." But King's Regulations do not cover such problems as the relations between Guy and Virginia, and cannot be solved along the lines of moustache and swagger, just as there is no precedent for Apthorpe in regimental custom. Guy's first attempt to solve his problems is doomed to failure. The attempt was undertaken, appropriately as Guy perhaps thought, on St. Valentine's Day, that "patron to killers and facetious lovers." Perhaps the failure happened because the facetious lover set out as a "killer."

From such a reversal comes increased self-knowledge, and Guy returns to his unit prepared to study with greater detachment the "fundamental implausibility" of his double. "Any firm passage between Apthorpe's seemingly dreamlike universe and the world of common experience was a thing to cherish"; so Guy selects as a line of attack his partner's shadowy civilian past, his career at school and his High Church aunt at Tunbridge Wells. About his military career there was a similar implausi-

bility: an overt side radiating blatant technicolour ("like Bonnie Prince Charlie in the film," as Guy reflected), complemented by a shadow side decidedly "off-colour," his furtive drinking and bouts of Bechuana tummy, his proneness to flaps and sensitivity in matters of rank. And it is here that the Brigadier strikes with his offensive against the "Bush Thunder-Box," while Crouchback, though overtly associated with Apthorpe as "joint custodian" of the disputed object, shows, by the superb irony of much of his advice to his fellow-conspirator, a relish in the epic contest hardly less than that of Ritchie-Hook. The active and the contemplative functions thus unleash between them a double offensive which reduces the "Miles Gloriosus" to his more grotesque successor, the "Miles Furibundus," who, even in the last days of his life, is still muttering about "a bomb in the rears."

The Battle of the Thunder-Box is a very complex engagement: a "tense personal drama," since it saw the transference of Guy's allegiance from Apthorpe to Ritchie-Hook, and played out against a military and a liturgical background. As a military operation it was a supreme illustration of the tactics of surprise, and of "biffing" the enemy, by one who "saw war itself as a prodigious booby trap." As a time of purgation it began with the Brigadier's first avenging descent on the officers' training course on Ash-Wednesday, and rose to a climax in Holy Week at the very end of the course. "As Guy foresaw, those mad March days and nights of hide-and-seek drained into a deep well of refreshment in his mind." As for Apthorpe, those "mad March days and nights" had the effect of driving him as mad as a March hare.

Even the object for whose possession, and denial to the enemy, the battle is fought, is complex. It is successively a defence against infection, a piece of property, a reminder of the past and a promise of the future. It is, perhaps, in all its grotesque inappropriateness, a subtle symbol of the private personality, the epitome of all the negative nostalgic desires, all the fastidious withdrawal, of the civilian turned soldier. "Thunder-box" is indeed, as Guy reflects at its passing, "the *mot-juste*." For it is "something rare and mysterious," a throne, a source of power, and the Brigadier, in shattering it, has appealed successfully to a certain sense of ascetic detachment in Guy himself—and has *stolen Apthorpe's thunder*.

Having cleared the ground for operations, the Brigadier can



now dispense his own brand of bush magic. If the spell of Apthorpe was a blatant extraverted one, and to that extent false for the maimed and introverted Romantic, Ritchie-Hook speaks to him with a potent spell which bridges the gulf between reality and dream, fact and fiction, and reaches back into his childhood imaginings:

"Gentlemen," he began, "to-morrow you meet the men you will lead in battle."

It was the old, potent spell, big magic. Those two phrases, "the officers who will command you . . .", "the men you will lead . . .", set the junior officers precisely in their place, in the heart of the battle. For Guy they set swinging all the chimes of his boyhood's reading . . .

And there follows for Guy the first Truslove fantasy re-evoked from a spell-bound reading on a summer Sunday evening in his preparatory school. "I've chosen your squadron for the task, Truslove. . . . And I can tell you this, my boy, I'd give all my seniority and all these bits of ribbon on my chest to be with you. . . ." The chimes then set swinging do not fall silent in this volume, and the further development of this fantasy acts as an inward commentary on later external events. "'You've got the best command there is . . . There's nothing in life like leading a company in action . . .'" are words spoken later by Ritchie-Hook, but they are also genuine Truslove. The news that Leonard, a brother officer, is remaining behind ("pending posting") at the insistence of his wife, reminds Guy that something of this kind had happened in Captain Truslove's regiment. It concerned Captain Congreve, a showy polo-player, who had sent in his papers when the regiment was under orders for foreign service; "from colonel to drummer-boy all felt tainted and many of their subsequent acts of heroism were prompted by the wish to restore the regiment's honour." However, all became right in the end, for in the penultimate chapter Congreve turned up, "elaborately disguised as an Afghan merchant with the keys of the Pathan fortress where Truslove himself awaited execution by torture." So when at Dakar Guy volunteers to lead the Brigadier's reconnaissance patrol against Beach A, he reflects: "This was true Truslove-style," and later referred to it privately as "Operation Truslove."

And indeed no truer word was ever spoken. For the Dakar incident unites the two Truslove fantasies. "I've chosen your squadron for the task." Truslove's colonel knew that "my duty lies here with the Regiment"; not so Ritchie-Hook, who, chafing for action, smuggles himself ashore as supernumerary passenger and runs into trouble. So Crouchback changes from Truslove to Congreve, and, his face blackened—with cork—like an Afghan merchant, rescues his wounded Brigadier from the consequences of his own boldness, for which Ritchie-Hook hands him in reward the trophy of a head from the Pathan fortress ('French colonial infantry, sir. No identifications'). That in doing so Crouchback-Congreve has made good the failure of Leonard-Congreve is a further private satisfaction, a more worthy recovery of self-respect than "that he should exult in putting down Trimmer."

Unfortunately for those who planned and took part in the patrol, such private escapades do not for the moment fit into the plans of the Higher Command: the "old, potent spell" of Ritchie-Hook is at a discount in the eyes of the Force Commander, and it is doubtful whether the "true Truslove-style" will find favour with the War House. This double face of Operation Truslove, which ends in its two perpetrators flying home to appear before a Board of Enquiry, develops directly out of the fantasy. The War House is a more difficult place to storm than a Pathan fortress; so the negro head, symbol and trophy of the tactics of "biffing," turns into a booby-trap directed against the author of these tactics, and Ritchie-Hook has come very near to blowing himself up, and Guy with him. Truslove's Colonel would give all his seniority and all those bits of ribbon on his chest to be with Truslove and the Squadron; that is nearly what it looks like costing Ritchie-Hook.

But the Dakar incident does not end in unrelieved loss. "The flying-boat made another turn over White Man's Grave"—a final evocation of the spirit of Aphthorpe—"and set its course across the ocean, bearing away the two men who had destroyed Aphthorpe." One, Ritchie-Hook, had operated with "a bomb in the rears," the other, Crouchback, if one may continue in the spirit of Mr. Waugh's language, with "a bottle of whisky in the guts." The whisky bottle which, on the B.M.'s advice, but on his own responsibility, Crouchback smuggled in to Aphthorpe,

thus hastening his death, continues the theme of both the booby-trap and the severed head. Objects to which power, and thus responsibility attach, have a habit, like booby-traps, when in the wrong hands, of blowing a hole in an officer or his reputation. But Apthorpe is a different matter, being himself less offensively minded than a challenge to offensive tactics in others. And so the whisky-bottle, in its symbolical passage from B.M. to Crouchback and to Apthorpe, undergoes a change of nature, and from "passing the buck" and analogous military actions becomes a cleansing and purging act of the first order. After the painful scene with his new Brigade Commander which followed Apthorpe's death, Guy felt shaken, but not ashamed, "as though he had seen a road accident in which he was not concerned." He has graduated, by the symbolical slaying of the impostor, from Congreve the tarnisher of the regiment's honour to Congreve the officer who has proved his worth in action.

But the passing of Apthorpe is not only of significance for Crouchback. It is notable how the saga of Apthorpe, as it unfolds in training and in Scotland, is placed against a background of wider perspectives: the tactical policy of the Brigadier, of which it provoked a supreme demonstration, the season of Lent, in that for Guy at least it strengthened his sense of dedication, and lastly the march of public events and the operations of the enemy. Ritchie-Hook launched the first attack, by establishing user of the thunder-box, "two days after the fall of Finland," and the steady crescendo of events abroad puts flaps and wrangles about seniority at home at a discount, and biffing at a premium. Both Guy and Ritchie-Hook are profoundly out of sympathy with the phony war (replete with the spirit of Apthorpomania), Ritchie-Hook because of the lack of personal opportunity for biffing, and Guy because his sense of romantic and religious dedication finds no satisfaction in the minutiae of military training and the smug omissions of the newspaper reports. Far away on the frontiers of Christendom the Polish tragedy was proceeding ("trains of locked vans rolling East and West from Poland and the Baltic"), while guest-night in the Halberdiers' mess took its traditional and hallowed course, and the newspapers waxed indignant over such comparatively minor incidents as that of the *Altmark*, dubbed the "Hell Ship." Though Guy, with others, was at the time oblivious of all this, his honesty and lack of cant were

opposed both to the facile optimism of the Aphorpe mind before the event, and to its glib explanations after. For Guy there was only the growing and sickening suspicion that "he was engaged in a war in which courage and a just cause were quite irrelevant to the issue."

And yet, when the turn of Norway came, the usual sequence of false optimism and rapid discomfiture caused Guy's spirits to rise, and to be "as high as on the day he had bade farewell to Sir Roger." For now, for the first time, the very unprecedented nature of Allied failure and the enormity of the enemy's pretensions caused in him a fusion of the Romantic and the Religious theme. "There was in Romance great virtue in unequal odds. There were in morals two requisites for a lawful war, a just cause and the chance of victory. The cause was now, past all question, just. The enemy was exorbitant. . . . And the more victorious he was the more he drew to himself the enmity of the world and the punishment of God." Sir Roger has joined forces with last-minute Congreve and the server of the last Pope at the end of the world, to represent something like the unbeatable spirit of England ("he did not believe his country would lose this war"); but the presiding spirit at this gathering of the heroes is surely Ritchie-Hook, to whom Guy's last thoughts before falling asleep that evening return: "However inconvenient it was for the Scandinavians to have Germans there, it was very nice for the Halberdiers . . . a whole new coast-line was open for biffing."

Thus ends Chapter VII of Book Two. Chapter VIII begins immediately: "On the day that Mr. Churchill became Prime Minister, Aphorpe was promoted Captain." This, the second comic juxtaposition of these two names, is, at the same time, more than that. If we take into account Mr. Waugh's practice of counterpointing the passages immediately before and after a chapter division, we may well conclude that Mr. Churchill is the harbinger of the new policy of offensive warfare, and the symbol of a fusion between the Romance of unequal odds, the Justice of the cause, and the Tactics of biffing. A new star is rising on the horizon of Crouchback's spiritual world, and under its constellation we may expect a further slaying of Aphorpes, a stiffening of the crusading temper and moral and tactical fibre of the nation, and a clear and united policy of Hazardous Operations.

True, Mr. Churchill was at the moment known, at least in the Halberdiers' mess, only as a boastful politician. But the new note struck by the "brainy" Major Erskine ("Churchill is about the only man who may save us from losing this war") must have carried conviction for Guy—"a good loser—at any rate an experienced one." And Aphorpe's promotion? Just a reminder that the rot is not stopped by a wave of the hand from a new magician purveying "the old spell." The scene broadens out, and the canvas of the action allows Crouchback, Aphorpe, Ritchie-Hook and the new Prime Minister to appear as embodiments of the soul of England, as bearers of a mythical action against a background of contemporary history.

Such wider perspectives are, for Guy at least, incomplete without reference to ultimate values and sanctions. Here is the meaning of that small chapter of four pages, central to the construction of Book Two, and thus in a sense pivotal to the action of the volume, in which two brief contrasted scenes taking place in the early hours of Good Friday are introduced: an anonymous colloquy in a Most Secret headquarters in London, and Crouchback senior, with Guy, praying before the Altar of Repose at Matchet. On the surface, the Most Secret headquarters scene is a further hilarious extravaganza on the theme of the thunder-box, in which a fragment of information, transmuted by the alchemy of official stupidity, lands Guy and his brother-in-law Box-Bender on the Most Secret Index. A file is opened on each of them as possible spies associated with a secret weapon of the enemy. Meanwhile, before the Altar of Repose, we may surmise that Guy, and perhaps the other Box-Bender, Tony, now on active service, are being recommended to another Most Secret Authority; that Divine Providence is being asked to open a file on both of them, and take them under its especial care. The pathological susceptibility to the omnipresence of the enemy, a genuine trait of Aphorpomania (compare the parachutists and arsenical smoke), is contrasted with, and trumped by the simple and strong piety of the elder Crouchback. Unknown to the two officers who serve the spy-crazed military machine, the thunder-box has already been blown up by the offensive spirit of Ritchie-Hook; so the dawn which is admitted when the black-out screens are taken down is perhaps the new sane light of the Churchillian renaissance. The brilliant sunshine admitted at the



same moment by the sacristan at Matchet is possibly the anticipation of a gracious answer to the intercession of Crouchback senior with the other High Authority.

But does this other Authority also deal in Most Secret weapons? Indeed it does. Here is the significance of a theme which, grounded in this scene, runs intermittently through the first volume:

"You're wearing that medal?"

"Yes, indeed."

This innocent and inconspicuous exchange has a prologue and an epilogue. In the prologue, this medal of Our Lady of Lourdes, worn by Gervase Crouchback on his one and last day in the trenches, and intended by the father for Tony Box-Bender, was given, after Tony's hurried departure, to Guy. "If you get hit and taken to hospital, they know you're a Catholic and send for a priest." But this is only the exoteric significance of an object which has an esoteric role in the story. The simple sanctity of the elder Crouchback is the fountain-head and inspiration of all that his sons, Gervase, Ivo and Guy, possess of religious dedication. When all Guy's attempts to pull wires to get accepted into the Army come to precisely nothing, he visits his father at Matchet, and is presented, as on a plate, with a holy medal—and a commission. "It's remarkable," said Guy. "I spend weeks badgering generals and Cabinet Ministers and getting nowhere. Then I come here and in an hour everything is fixed up for me by a strange major." The strange major is Major Tickeridge, of the Halberdiers; but when the elder Crouchback replies "That's often the way," he may have a different private interpretation of the chain of causality.

That Guy's religious convictions ("a few, dry grains of faith") have not reached the saintly simplicity of his father, is clear from an intricate sequence during the Dakar incident, which we may call the epilogue to the holy medal theme. Guy finds Halberdier Glass, his stolid batman, chasing a Goanese steward out of his cabin. "Caught this black bastard in the very act, sir. Mucking about with your kit, sir." The Goanese protests that he is the cabin-boy, and no native, but a Christian Portuguese, and in proof produces from his starched blouse a gold medal. Guy yearned to show him his own medal: "There were men who would have done exactly that, better men than he; who would

perhaps have said 'Snap' and drawn a true laugh from the sullen Halberdier and so have made true peace between them." But Guy could only tip the Goanese and reprimand his servant. The Goanese went on his way "but not as a fellow man at peace; merely as a servant unexpectedly over-tipped." . . . "Sir," said Glass, looking at Guy as though at Captain Congreve who let down the regiment." In the earlier Good Friday scenes, the thunder-box and the medal were contrapuntally associated as secret weapons, the one religious, the other military, the one genuine, the other spurious, but both sources of power, of mana, of "thunder." The spirit of the thunder-box is exploded in the military life of Guy by Ritchie-Hook, and in the political life of the nation by Churchill. But Guy has just failed to ignite the fuse of the medal. He is able to extinguish with the whisky-bottle the false brotherhood with his doppelgänger Apthorpe; but he falls short of true brotherhood with the Goanese.

Again, as with the other part of the Dakar episode, the impending Board of Enquiry, the situation is not entirely unrelieved. Guy's failure to find a common denominator between Glass and the Goanese, which is his own incomplete poise between the active and the contemplative life, is at least partly retrieved when, on Beach A at Dakar, he sends Glass back to the boat with—of all things—a coconut:

"What, me, sir? This here nut, sir? Back to the boat?"

"Yes, don't talk. Get on with it."

He knew then that he had lost all interest in whether he held or forfeited Glass's esteem.

This is the counterpart, at the Sancho Panza level, of the tragic-comedy of the slaying of Apthorpe. At least Guy has distanced himself from the conventional "black bastard" outlook; at least the spirit of Captain Congreve, who let the side down, is being exorcized on that Beach.

In the end the incriminating and purgative roles of round objects, be they bombs, heads, nuts or bottles, are so fused in Mr. Waugh's imagination (and partly even in his diction, as when "head" becomes "coconut," and "coconut" becomes "nut"), that the scene in the reader's mind takes on the air of a grotesque fantasia. But most of all the last scene as Guy leaves the hospital after having planted the deadly bottle impresses itself on our



minds: Ritchie-Hook in one room happy in the possession of the negro's head, which he has inveigled a young R.A.M.C. officer into pickling for him ("Most unusual," said the R.A.M.C. Colonel), and Apthorpe, in another room, himself gradually becoming pickled with Guy's whisky ("I smell something I shouldn't," said the nurse). "It takes some time to kill an old bush hand," said Apthorpe, "but they'll do it. They wear one down." The last phrase becomes almost a leitmotif in the final scene between Crouchback and his double. Is this the final laying by army life of a ghost—the desire to preserve a civilian sense of personality, the passing of the "miles gloriosus" and the coming of a new sense of detachment, of impersonality?

Many views expressed by critics on *Men at Arms* have shown once more how irrelevant to the inmost nature of Mr. Waugh's writing are such perennial figments of the critical imagination as "realism" and "character-drawing." One writer found the character of Crouchback senior not wholly convincing and commented—in truth an under-statement—that Virginia is drawn as a somewhat unattractive figure. Another thought it was never entirely clear why Crouchback junior should have been unpopular, while yet another regretted that, owing to Apthorpe's unhappy death, we cannot hope to meet this richly comic character again in the remaining two volumes. Such reactions regard the characters as ends in themselves, without reference to the total vision of their creator; and somewhere in the background lurks always the old fallacy of "trueness to life." Judged by such criteria it is not surprising that a pang of regret should accompany the demise of Apthorpe—but that way lies aesthetic anarchy. For Apthorpe *must* die if Mr. Waugh is to realize his general plan at all. And in spite of the general acclamation of his richly comical quality, one reader at least was relieved when this powerful evocation of a character in conflict, this miasmal emanation of a false attitude to things military, was at last, after serving his purpose, painlessly removed. Apthorpe is not comedy, he is a grotesque, poised, as the grotesque always is, between comedy and tragedy, and limited, unless it is to become altogether more daemonic, to a short and disturbing course. Did those who regretted Apthorpe's death pause to think that the doppelgänger must either die, to the lasting benefit of his counterpart, or live and draw the life-force from the hero, and

condemn him to go down in despair? Did they desire for Crouchback-England the same fate as befell Dostoevsky's Golyadkin or R. L. Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll, when faced with and worsted by their doubles? Fortunately, from the moment when Crouchback first impersonates the impersonator, there is no doubt which one Mr. Waugh intends to emerge the victor.

And if some find Crouchback senior not wholly convincing, we may ask, of what should he convince us? The question itself suggests that the answer would fall on the wrong side of the line dividing art from life. Mr. Waugh himself gives no warrant for such questions. Both in his own person and in the character of John Plant, he has declared his opposition to the "realistic" school of criticism: "The algebra of fiction must reduce its problems to symbols if they are to be soluble at all. I am shy of a book commended to me on the ground that the 'characters are alive.' There is no place in literature for a live man, solid and active."<sup>1</sup>

Guy and his father have each a special relationship to the world of the Halberdiers. Guy is a man divided upon himself, between an external desire to accept the spirit of his new milieu, and internal difficulties in doing so. The embodiment of this conflict is Apthorpe. Not so Crouchback senior, who, with none of the externals, is an *anima naturaliter halberdiana*:

"Here's how," said the major.

"Here's how," said the mousy wife.

"Here's how," said Mr. Crouchback with complete serenity.

But Guy could only manage an embarrassed grunt.

Guy in fact only managed the new term in the next chapter (another example of effective enjambement between chapters) when fortified by the atmosphere of the Mess and the presence of Apthorpe. Not that Crouchback senior would ever be drawn into the closed world of military "shop," he is rather a line drawn tangential to a closed circle, with its origin and terminus lying far beyond the circle, in the infinity of his faith. But the line of a tangent is perfectly poised at the point of contact; so we may well infer that it is of his father that Guy is thinking, when he reflects at Dakar that there were men, better men than he, who would have made inspired use of the medal. Indeed a

<sup>1</sup> *Work Suspended*, 1942 edition, pp. 82-83; the passage does not appear in the Penguin edition.

tangent is, in a sense, as much a part of a circle as its circumference, since the latter can be defined as the sum total of all points of tangential contact. This is the truth which Mr. Waugh has so skilfully exploited: the life of an army is open to infinite perspectives at many points.

The algebra of fiction may seem to have given place here to a disordered geometry of criticism. But there is a genuine analogy. For the point at which a finite world—a part of the endless flux of events and persons separated out by agglomeration round an idea such as "military life"—the point at which such a world touches on infinity is the home of the symbol. In this work Tickeridge is the embodiment of the world of the Halberdiers, and Crouchback senior a tangent which touches it with complete conformity. Both are perfectly poised and complete in themselves; they thus preside jointly and harmoniously over Guy's entry into the Corps. In between are those figures in which the impact of circle and tangent causes a dynamic tension—Ritchie-Hook, the purveyor of big magic; Guy, trying, through the symbols of his inner vision, to unite the worlds of Tickeridge and of his father; and Apthorpe, the first stage in this attempt, a travesty of the poised circle of the Halberdiers, spinning round on a non-existent axis, until with the withdrawal of power he wobbles and falls. Thus Mr. Waugh's "algebra of fiction" leads him to a technique which places all the leading figures of the book in fruitful and symbolical opposition and tension. Primarily there is Guy and Apthorpe, but secondarily Apthorpe and Ritchie-Hook, Apthorpe and Crouchback senior, Guy and his father—the possibilities of such reflections, as in a sequence of mirrors, are endless. And endless also are the inter-relationships of properties: holy medal, thunder-box, negro-head, whisky-bottle; the verbal associations which are evoked in that wide penumbra between meaning and sound: stealing his thunder, as mad as a March hare; the numerous military situations which may arise out of booby-traps; and the evocative possibilities of names, such as Crouchback the introvert, Apthorpe and his predecessors Atwater and Appleby, Trimmer the black sheep marked out for a career of ignominy, Halberdiers Gold and Glass, and the savage irony of "Virginia."

As an epilogue the present writer is permitted to add Mr. Waugh's own comments on the interpretation offered in the

preceding pages. The function of the father, he says, was "to keep audible a steady undertone of the decencies and true purpose of life behind the chaos of events and fantastic characters. Also to show him as a typical victim (parallel to the trainloads going to concentration camps) in the war against the Modern Age."<sup>1</sup> Referring to another interpretation in this periodical,<sup>2</sup> he says that *Men at Arms* was written more instinctively than *Helena*. Much of the counterpoint described in the above pages must have come about at the subconscious level, since "many of the points made were hitherto unrecognized by me, *e.g.*, the idea of Virginia being herself a 'civilian under arrest.'" Mr. Waugh is himself too sensitive of the distinction between creation and criticism to comment in greater detail, so the present writer is content to rest his case on the consensus of readers' opinion, and the words of Chesterton, borrowed with grateful acknowledgement from the preface of another critic, Mr. O'Donnell,<sup>3</sup> that the function of criticism, if it has one, can only be "that of dealing with the subconscious part of the author's mind which only the critic can express, and not with the conscious part of the author's mind which the author himself can express."

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 19 January 1954.

<sup>2</sup> "Grace in Reins, Reflections on Mr. Waugh's 'Brideshead' and 'Helena,'" **THE MONTH**, August 1953.

<sup>3</sup> D. O'Donnell, *Maria Cross*, London, 1953.

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# ANOTHER 'REFORMATION'

By

C. C. MARTINDALE

LIKE ALL OVER-WORKED WORDS, "Reformation" has ceased to convey a definite meaning. It should, presumably, mean putting something back into its original form, or putting it into a new form, but has come to mean putting it into a better form, and the various revolutions that are roughly connected with the name of Luther are now what is understood by *the* Reformation. This is a pity, because nothing was formed by those revolutions (carried through more by princes than by peasants), save the fragmentization of religious allegiance and, indeed, that of Europe itself. Thus we deprecate the very name of "Counter-Reformation," for the self-purification of the Church had started before and quite independently of Luther (though we do not understand why the very unrepresentative names of Cardinal Quiñones and Erasmus are chosen by Canon Raven in a recent book for mention here),<sup>1</sup> nor was it directed only against any one movement, nor has it ceased since then nor will it ever. That first Reformation having run its term, Milton was, soon enough, asking for a new Reformation, and T. H. Huxley asked for another, and Canon Raven thinks that a new Reformation is in fact taking place. Happily he at once defines what he means: in his previous book he had shown that "traditional orthodoxy was no longer consonant with educated knowledge or adequate to meet the moral needs of the social order then coming to birth." "As in the sixteenth century so now Christianity was in the main allied with . . . convictions and policies which affronted the intelligence and scandalized the conscience of the age. . . ." Huxley genuinely desired "to see

<sup>1</sup> *Natural Religion and Christian Theology*. Gifford Lectures, 1952; Second Series: Experience and Interpretation, by C. E. Raven, D.D., D.Sc. (Cambridge University Press 21s.).

religion able once more to satisfy the aspirations and guide the conduct of mankind." Hence, as of old, Man is to be the measure of all things; if "religion" cannot adapt itself to the ideas, conscience and social forms of the age, so much the worse for religion. Huxley did in fact think that the new Reformation "might well prove beyond the strength of the institutions that required it." But the Canon is able to display a long list of men who "held together the worlds of science and theology through the dark days of the opening century down to the present."

In parenthesis, he does not seem to know much about the history of study on the Continent. There never was any taboo "imposed by Propaganda" upon "scholarship," Scriptural or other. The expression of various opinions, and especially of hypotheses offered as demonstrations, was indeed forbidden, with great profit to everyone. For how often in the interpretation of Scripture have we watched theory after theory (which were in turn condemned or temporarily halted) fading out altogether, though at best (as in the suggestion of possible "sources" or in the admitted possibility of "inspired fiction") leaving behind them relics of marked utility? Canon Raven has been dazzled by the over-seas Modernists and could not see, or was unaware of, the massive unhalting work being done by Catholics contemporary with the English or Scottish authors whom he mentions. To our mind, the Scriptural work done by the Dominican School in Jerusalem, or the hagiographical work of the Jesuit Bollandists, or historical work in general, have proved of at least equal value, despite great impoverishments due to revolutionary or anticlerical Governments. Of course, in a hundred ways Catholics have been able to profit by the researches—palaeographical, ethnological, etc.—of non-Catholics: the former are enabled to base and corroborate their traditional positions much more firmly; and probably non-Catholic scholars do not notice how far they themselves have swung round towards theories not out of keeping (if not identical) with Catholic doctrine.

But, as we said, this is in parenthesis: we ought to struggle to find out what the author's meaning is—for, frankly, he sometimes speaks of what is immemorial Catholic doctrine as though it were a discovery, or again, contradicts much of it flatly. Dr. Raven's view of the universe is "holist," but since the process is



manifestly still unfinished, his view is teleological as well, but by no means in the "watch and watch-maker" sense. *Mens agitat molem*: Thought thrills the mass; there is a *nisus* throughout creation towards life and a more abundant life: the urge goes on steadily from the amoeba up (so far) to the saint. But he will not tolerate any dualism in this development, as for example that of material body versus spiritual soul; gone are the days when "it was obligatory for the Christian to believe that man possessed a distinctive spiritual nature, the 'soul,' and that this conferred immortality in the hereafter." But I do not think he alludes to what would seem to be philosophically certain as well as dogmatically taught, that man is "body-soul": it is true that man does not "possess" a soul (or a body, for that matter!): he *is* soul; he *is* body, and yet, one person. Dr. Raven is distinguished for his knowledge of bird- and insect-life, indeed, his pages upon this are among the most interesting in the book: but nothing that he tells us can bridge the gulf between instinct and the rational and therefore spiritual soul; nor is duality, complexity, the same as dualism in the sense in which he seems to use it. Indeed, this denial of the indestructible soul has serious consequences, for, to judge by his last chapter, by no means every soul survives into eternal life, but only such as have had some participation in it in their earthly life. It is here not least that his argument seems confused. Who ever doubted that the Kingdom of Heaven is both inchoate on earth and to be perfected hereafter? As if the "Pauline insistence on freedom and on life in Christ" was "never fully appreciated until the Reformation"! Or as if theology had to wait for Professor Dodd to "demonstrate that the apocalyptic eschatology of the Synoptists is not inconsistent with the belief in the Kingdom here and now, or with the later Pauline and Johannine interpretations"! He goes on to say: "It is indeed evident that the traditional eschatology—a literal Second Coming, not immediate but in fact indefinitely postponed—destroys the whole significance of the Gospel of the Kingdom."

Moreover, Dr. Raven refuses to admit the duality of nature and super-nature, though he is quite able to draw valid distinctions himself—thus, he tells Mr. Aldous Huxley that "it is simply not the case" to identify non-attachment with *agapé* (he should read Fr. de Lubac on the Buddhist idea of love, pity, and so forth), or that an impersonal deity is the same as a super-personal

one. He does not want us to "scale Christ down" to our experiences, nor exclude rationality from our interpretation of experience: should theology be quite out of touch with the ordinary world, "we are back in the theophany of a divine intruder" (*intruder, intrusion*, are words that he willingly uses when afraid that Our Lord may somehow be regarded as not truly Man). On page 89 we read that Bishop Hensley Henson "appealed to the clause 'who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven' as the criterion of orthodoxy. That any modern man, let alone one so clever and for a time so liberal as Henson, should have chosen a phrase *so archaic in its cosmology*<sup>1</sup> and so open to criticism in its theology" shows how "inadequate and misleading" the Christology of Nicaea and Chalcedon has proved to be. It has chosen "to lay stress upon a metaphysical and one-sided statement of His origin and 'nature' rather than upon His relationship with us, His quality, His influence, His meaning." As if the formula commits us to anything cosmological at all, even when Christ Himself originated it!

Say what one will, however nobly Dr. Raven writes about Our Lord, he ends up by relying on our human experience of Him, so far as we can trust it. So the assurance of faith is whittled away. With faith reduced to feeling, what secure anchorage is left for the Christian soul? "It is precisely this claim to an absolute finality . . . that revelation belongs to a totally different order of reality from discovery or that a creed is something more than a working-hypothesis, that perplexes and affronts those of us who have a proper sense of our own limitations. We can be utterly convinced as we encounter Christ that He expresses for us in terms of human life the quality of God, that He fulfils and surpasses all that we know or can conceive of God. . . . We can therefore make the venture of faith and stake our lives on the truth of His revelation. But we cannot, if we are to be truthful, say more than that He is God for us; for this is the most that in our finite and human state we can say of any such conviction." But if you exclude the supernatural you necessarily exclude the "*gift*" of faith, which does lift us beyond our limitations, and alone does so.

Since the supernatural as such is excluded as creating a dualism, Dr. Raven has to rely upon experiences more and more sublime

<sup>1</sup> Italics ours.

till they may reach a "rapt." Well, Catholics do not disdain experiences—St. Ignatius gives a surprising amount of attention to them in his *Exercises*; but not on them is faith to be based. St. Teresa would have given all her "rapt" for one act of humble virtue: St. John of the Cross tells us *never* to pay attention to such consolations—if they are indeed "words from God," they will do their work in us, independently of us. And yet the *via negativa* did not at all imply that the world is "a place of darkness from which a definite withdrawal is demanded"; those very saints wanted their monasteries to have wide views around them, and St. John himself made intensive use of imagery while maintaining rightly that nothing created could be an adequate image of God, and would knock his knuckles raw against the wall to prevent himself from having an ecstasy.

Dr. Raven's approach to Scripture is meant to be careful, though critical, but remains subjective. (Our study of the "Higher Criticism" of Homer, at Oxford, made us so sceptical about the methods employed as to inoculate us effectively against similar methods when applied to Scripture.) The Canon admits that the New Testament writers thought that what they said was true; but, "given their background, their view on cosmology, demonology, etc., their reports were such as later writers would not have given. Those who believe that demons can enter swine or food be miraculously multiplied will be liable to affirm that they have seen such marvels": when Christ said that the blind receive their sight, and so forth, "we can interpret those words physically if we will"; if we do not judge the evidence for the Virgin Birth or the physical Resurrection adequate, we need not, for that, feel banished from Christendom: as for the uprush of religious excitement at Pentecost, "culminating in the ecstatic utterance of 'tongues' . . . which made such utterance intelligible and, as men thought, native," well, "it is unfortunate that this common psychic phenomenon should have made such an impression on the author of the Acts" (the primary event having been the birthday of the Community): the "extravagances" of Daniel may be partly reaction against Hellenism—prophecy versus philosophy: the Apocalypse "represents a type of imagination poles apart from that of the Fourth Gospel, and in some sense a protest against it."

It is no purpose of ours here to deal with such conclusions and

opinions, but it is, at least, odd to find how the same material can produce totally different impressions upon different readers! To us, it seems all-but demonstrable that the Apocalypse came from the same mind and mouth as the Gospel; and really, is it so inconceivable that a man's imagination and diction might work differently according to the topic on which he is engaged, its *genre*, his circumstances? Look at Aquinas! Look again at St. John of the Cross! Nor would we know whither to turn for evidence that the ecstatic utterances at Pentecost were a "common" psychic phenomenon, especially if they issued into speakers and hearers having a community-birthday! We have assisted at only one similar event (in an "Irvingite" church), where both speaking in a "tongue" and interpretation left the audience completely cold.

Some brevities: We cannot see so much development in the series Mark, Matthew, and Luke (or within the epistles of St. Paul) as the author does, though we are glad that he perceives no gradual deification of Christ in the Synoptists. We think that in the past the role of Mithraism has been vastly exaggerated: the interpretation of its sculptures is almost wholly speculative: we consider that the Mysteries affected neither general Christian thought, nor liturgical act, nor even diction. To detect any similarity between the major cures at Lourdes and those due to Coué or Zulu witch-doctors is out of date and surely frivolous. The Church did not "declare" Origen damned nor canonize St. Cyril of Alexandria, whose heroicity I am glad, along with his contemporaries, to recognize. We are not of course surprised that Dr. Raven should be unable to take the Catholic perspective; but surely Edith Stein is far better worth quoting than Simone Weil; the ethics of Catholicism are not just "prudential"; and even if the Protestant may prefer the "twice-born," *i.e.*, the penitent sinner, Catholics do not see in the "Little Flower" merely one who was childishly "innocent and obedient," but a most ardent adventurous soul who—her earthly spell of terrible suffering once over—sped powerfully around the globe. When the Canon comments on the seemingly "exclusivist" logic of Catholic Christendom, he seems unaware of the doctrine of baptism by desire as well as of standard formulas like "*Deus non obligatur sacramentis, sed nos; Gratia sequitur naturam; Facienti quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam*"; each of them, of

course, demanding its own proper explanation. Furthermore, while the Gift of the Spirit (about whom the author writes as penetratingly as he does devotedly about Our Lord) makes a man member of "the invisible Church" He (the Spirit) cannot be called the "hall-mark" of that membership, since no one knows to whom He is, or is not, given. Finally, in explanation of the doctrine of human society itself, and of its nature, nothing has been produced in modern times so lucid yet profound, so all-embracing yet coherent, as the series of Encyclicals published by Leo XIII and his successors. The voice may not have been listened to, or even allowed to be heard; but it has spoken, and its solitary rival has been that of Communism.

The above has not been set down with a controversial, but with a descriptive intent, save in so far as we hold the word "Reformation" to be a misnomer in this connection. The word connotes "Luther," and Luther was far from wishing to bring religion into harmony with the science and conscience of the times. Dr. Raven sets himself a task all the more difficult because, he admits, science is far less dogmatic than it was and hesitates to define any of its frontiers. As for what "the modern conscience" is, God alone knows. England's nebulous religion is confronted by the absolutely clean-cut aims of Russia; no more can we say "Marxism," since Russia has moved so far from that. This, however, we can say: Christ certainly meant His message to be preached; but you cannot preach an "*as if*." I cannot treat Our Lord "*as if*" He were God, when perhaps after all He isn't. We can imagine Dr. Raven's subtle "Christianity" appealing to an ever narrower circle of the "cultured": but the State-God, humanly speaking, appeals to the masses of East and West alike, and is the only consistent challenge to the Church, as Caesarism, from the very outset, was.



## AN ADMIRAL OF THE 'RED'

THIS IS A VERY ODD AND PROLIX SIDELIGHT on Russian life as it was.<sup>1</sup> As a rule Russian gentlemen do not get torpedoed in the China seas, live in the top layer of defunct Mayfair Society, win the D.S.O., serve in the Red Navy in Kerensky days, and retire as accomplished flute-players.

The book has been acclaimed for the many strange passages of life not to be found in other English books (such as the minute accounts of the rural and peasant questions in Russia), but it has also been called dull. It certainly has its tundras, but it is far from dull for those who know how to explore its pages. Reviews have been superficial catching at odds and ends, which seem superficial, and avoiding so much that will never be garnered out of an English book again. The lack of an index tries reader and reviewer sorely.

The chapters on childhood and provincial life in Russia describe a society and peasant condition which have passed for ever, but the study of any periods of the main occupation of humanity is always of interest and sometimes of abiding value. As the civilized countries approach the hungry decades ahead, all farming, even feudal and unmechanized, needs to be kept in mind. Famine is possibly a greater menace than the H.-Bomb, and Russia, whether under Co-operation or Collectivist experiment, demands the closest attention—equally the old-fashioned conditions out of which the present methods have sprung.

So we come to the Benckendorff family of German origin, seated in the centre of Russia in the Province of Tambov. Who has ever heard of Sosnofka except Maurice Baring, who studied Russia from that hospitable roof, and the present reviewer who spent unforgettable days there nearly fifty years ago? Sosnofka, "about three hundred miles south-east of Moscow—from a European point of view in the middle of Nowhere!"

Count Benckendorff, the author's father, was a Catholic married into Shovalovs and Narishkins. Peter the Great's mother was a Narishkin, and the Shovalovs were Aristocratic Liberals, corresponding to English Whigs. The author's grandfather, Peter Shovalov, had liberated 100,000 serfs on his own. Princess Lieven, remembered for her platonic romance and letters with Earl Grey, was a Benckendorff. Owing to his wide connections the Count was pressed into diplomacy—Vienna, Copenhagen, and finally Ambassador in London. Heralds

<sup>1</sup> *Half a Life: The Reminiscences of a Russian Gentleman*, by Count Constantine Benckendorff (Richards Press 25s.).



will be interested in the curious connection between the Benckendorffs and Marshal Hindenburg, which was only revealed to the Count by two German Spartacists who had strayed into Soviet Russia after the Revolution. The Benckendorffs carried on their arms the roses drawn by a Danish king in blood in remembrance of battle-wounds in the thirteenth century. This was also Hindenburg's, whose branch had stayed in Germany while the others migrated to Esthonia in the sixteenth century.

In Copenhagen the family met and practically adopted Maurice Baring. Later in London the Ambassador played one of the great careers and, having averted war with Russia over the Dogger Bank incident, might have averted the First War—at least if Sir Edward Grey had been willing to give him and Cambon the assurance that England would stand at one with France and Russia and that the fatal phrase "*entente cordiale*" was really a euphemism for "military alliance." What Benckendorff endured during those days of delay precipitating the war is not told. His friends believed his hair had already turned grey over the Dogger Bank crisis. He was destined to stay at his post till 1917, when he died and was nobly interred in Westminster Cathedral.

Having placed the family in British memories, return to the young Count's memoirs, which are often acutely valuable for the contrasts he points out with English life. Incidentally the photographs of home life show no difference. The picnic might be located on Hampstead Heath but for the samovar. But criticizing the Public School mentality, he found it capable in deductive power but useless in factual scientific knowledge. Hereditary landowners saw the country in terms of the sporting or picturesque, but not economically. They could tell him nothing about local government.

The contrasts between the British and the Russian Navy (in which the Count volunteered in 1899) must have been equally considerable. This brought him into the East in time for the Russian war with Japan—the fall of Port Arthur, the sinking of the flagship with Admiral Makaroff on a mine, and the return blow, when two Japanese battleships steered directly for a newly-laid minefield: "As they approached danger, the suspense on our ships became well-nigh intolerable, and hopes had already begun to fade when two columns of black smoke appeared over two of the Japanese ships, greeted by a tremendous roar from the crews of our ships." As the war developed the unfortunate Russian fleet had no chance against the Japanese, who were given every opportunity. On 25 January 1904 the Count lowered the torpedo-nets of the *Retvisan* at 5 p.m. But three hours later came the Admiral's signal: "STOW TORPEDO NETS REPEAT" (author's capitals). The order came from St. Petersburg as part of a pacific drive not to

provoke the Japanese. The sequel must have been burned into the Count's brain. Soon after 11 p.m. he was reading Maurice Baring's play on Tristan when he was torpedoed! A year later Port Arthur surrendered, and the Count found himself a prisoner of war. The Japanese proved model hosts (for they were anxious to show how civilized they could be). Officers were given the choice of being prisoners or returning home on parole. They were housed in pagodas and attended by Orthodox Japanese priests. Archbishop Nicholas, Bishop of Japan, was the only Russian not interned. Prisoners were allowed to hire houses and rickshaws, and must have lived in an Oriental dream. The treatment of prisoners as honoured guests has hardly been improved by the European Powers since in spite of the constant opportunities all have had to enjoy each other's hospitalities. The Count was astounded to be invited by a Japanese professor to explain the philosophy of Kant, and by another to see some fabulous chrysanthemums and dwarf-gardens worthy of the most minutely-perfected doll's-houses of the West. He could claim a time of imprisonment "not only interesting but enjoyable."

At the end of 1905 the Russians were sent home. One morning their English paper had been delivered earlier and in more numerous copies. It told of the annihilation of the Second Pacific Squadron at Tsushima. This disaster cast a hopeless gloom, and the author unreasonably (as he confesses) suggests it was as well the officers of the two squadrons did not meet in captivity. And yet both squadrons had done their bravest, but had been betrayed from their Government. If the First Squadron had been ordered to pull up their torpedo-nets in time to be torpedoed, the Second had been sent into a death-trap. Admiral Togo had annihilated them: and here we can add an unrecorded incident. One of the Russian ships escaped to the Philippines, where the crews could be interned. The American Governor proved hospitable, and the unfortunate officers, fearing they had arrived under the slur of flight and cowardice, entertained in turn and took one occasion to open one of their shells. They invited the daughters of the Governor to drop a match in the supposed gun-cotton. It fizzled out in dry sand! Some contractor no doubt had profited, and the Japanese won an easy victory.

It was an interesting link with the past that the General, under whom the Russian prisoners found themselves, still limped from an arrow wound! It would have been as strange a symbol of the Time-spirit if some British General had been dug out by the War Office during the First War—bearing marks of a wound received from a bowman at Flodden!

However, the Count returned to civilization, and on arrival at Moscow learned that the same morning the Grand Duke, Governor-

General and uncle of the Czar, had been assassinated! He realized then how deeply Russian life was beginning to change. Before he could return to country life his father sent for him to view the international situation from the Russian Embassy in Chesham Place. Follows a London interlude.

During a twelvemonth he tasted an Edwardian Society which has disappeared as totally as that of Czarist Petrograd. As the Earls of Pembroke were related to the Shovalovs, his experiences began with a visit to Wilton. The magnificence displayed abashed even a connection of Peter the Great. Thanks to Maurice Baring, the new cipher-clerk at the Embassy, fresh from the Pacific, passed into layers and select corners of Society that were then guarded from the bore, the bourgeois and the *nouveau-riche* as sternly as the French trenches which were to bear the immortal words: *ils ne passeront pas*.

The Benckendorffs passed into the company of the "Souls," the rarest of England's dilettante blue-stockings, mixed with names which now only live in books. These were the Horners at Mells, the Manners at Avon Tyrrell, Lady Ripon entertaining the Russian Ballet at Coombe, while Lord Ripon practised another art with his loaders on the lawn. His Lordship was son of the convert Viceroy, while her Ladyship was daughter of the convert Lady Herbert of Lea. Then came the Asquiths at the Wharf, and it was here the Prime Minister consulted him about the obscure assassination at Sarajevo which occurred during one weekend. The Count exploded a violent discussion, maintaining the Russian position against all opposition. But Germany was still an academic subject of debate in June 1914. In the first week of July his father suddenly remarked to him, "You had better pack up and go back. I think that this time we are in for it."

Meantime he had tasted English literary life—Maurice Baring, Bron Lucas, Hilaire Belloc; but only one scene survives clearly and that was at Maurice Baring's house-warming in North Square, attended by all sorts from Arthur Balfour to Bernard Shaw. The unforgettable scene was the ragging of H. G. Wells, who was forced to undergo a mock operation "disposed on a large table. With handkerchiefs substituted for masks, they went through the motions, making the symbolic act as realistic as possible, if harmless." What a strange squint into the past!—a scene that Donald Tovey accompanied on the piano.

Another scene on the brink of war was more tragic and reached the Press. The Count's farewell party took place on the Thames, with band and supper on a launch. By making a gesture of bravado, Denis Anson and a rescuing bandsman were drowned. To his great credit the host swam to the rescue, but in vain against the tide. Society was much upset, but all was forgotten in the outbreak of war. The Count

had returned to the Russian Navy and might never have been heard of again, but he was destined to play a staggering part in the history of the British Navy. He was suddenly sent on a confidential mission back to London carrying the signal-book taken from the German cruiser *Magdeburg* which was abandoned by her crew on the island of Oesel. It is impossible to realize what that meant to the Admiralty, which could now read German code messages and sometimes send a message themselves, as before the Falklands battle. "The secret of this discovery was so well kept that the Germans continued to use the same code throughout the war." To complete his mission he carried back to Russia copies of the German recoding tables on onion paper, which needed some tact passing through Norway and Sweden. For this double journey we presume he received his D.S.O.

Appointed to Archangel during the war, he was cut off from opinion and events in Russia. The death of his father in 1917 brought an echo of London life, but Russian history was a blank for that corner of the Arctic until the shock of a message from the Provisional Government! The Count continued service at Petrograd under Kerensky's régime. "The arrival of Lenin at the Finland Station and his subsequent exile after the abortive July rising, the first manifestation of Bolshevism, left little impression." Kerensky he found sincere and fearless, and he admired the Count's father as "the only statesman among the Emperor's representatives abroad." But the Revolution went ahead and the Count returned to Sosnofka until Kerensky passed him on to a mission, which he considered the most nonsensical he ever made, as guide to a Canadian Colonel Boyle to Rumania. He had the "strange errand" of inquiring and explaining the possibilities of small-gauge railways, such as were used in the Klondike, where Boyle had been an adventurer during the gold rush. But his presence was very puzzling and apparently led to nothing except an enjoyable visit to Rumania. The reader is left to puzzle out a mystery story which the Count would be interested to find continued in the *Memoirs of Queen Marie of Rumania*. Boyle became an attached friend of the royal family and was able always to emphasize British interests. In the history of Rumania he became important enough to have a street named after him and to the royal children was known as "Uncle Joe" long before he retired leaving that endearing appellation for another perhaps more historical adventurer.

There is scant mention of religion in the compendious volume, except an occasion when during the revolution he came into contact with the Berdayev circle, "which had a profound and lasting influence on the spiritual life of the Russian patriarchate." Such was their "constructive elevation of theological thought" that he was convinced their Church could resist any storm. The attitude of the Orthodox Church

has long mystified observers at a distance. The Count thinks that the action of the revolutionary state against the Church was accepted by the people as a form of anticlericalism, "behind which the spiritual life of the Church went on not only unabashed, but grew and was intensified by the dangers with which the atheist Marxist creed threatened it." It was this passive non-resistance which seemed to him to characterize the gulf between the Eastern and Western Church: between the Patriarchate and Rome.

Returning to country life, the Count was picked up for service in the Red Navy. But for one of his name and class it became always uncomfortable, and though in practice he met with the utmost appreciation and kindness from the Soviet peasants and the new naval officials, he gradually edged away into England, where the remnants of the Benckendorff family held out in East Anglia. He found his final vocation as a musician, perhaps the best flautist of his generation.

In spite of a heavy style the high-lights force themselves into flashing scenes. For instance, the withering interview between Vera Figner and Comrade Kameneff as the old aristocratic lady cursed the new chairman (shortly to visit England as a plenipotentiary). But who was Vera? She was a survivor of the assassins condemned to death for slaying Alexander II the Liberator. Her execution had been deferred until her child was born in 1880. The son of her victim reprieved her, and she had been a state-prisoner ever since and had become a "legendary figure in the eyes of all." And the following words of the author are striking in criticism of the preceding: "how far they remove me from the present day when both sides in the world-struggle admit vengeance and extermination only. . . ."

Here was an old Christian Russia admitting the sublime gesture in the Czar and also the humanity of the Soviet peasants of Sosnofka. This is perhaps the note on which to conclude a review of a book which is far more informing and important as social Russian history than English reviewers have realized.

One strange linguistic error has been made by this master of languages. On p. 293 he reveals his belief that the "Welsh keep Gaelic alive"! Another odd remark describes the working of the Red Navy Staff: "They worked in pairs like the gendarmes and I am told the Jesuits." Is this so, or may we offer it as a suggestion to the English Province? There must be very few, who like the reviewer on his first night on the Russian border was removed from the train to be questioned on his British passport in which he had to deny being a Jew or a Jesuit! But that was in 1907.

Two passages about the Russian peasant should be studied from several points of view: p. 71, when the Count decides from his naval experience that the peasant was "the most intelligently adaptable in



any skilled occupation," and not the lout or yokel such as they are or were esteemed in most countries. This was also the view of General Sir William Butler, a memory to be cherished by Catholics. Secondly, on p. 247, the Revolution caused the Count to realize that the peasantry were "politically conscious, entirely capable of looking after their country, both in internal and external affairs, and therefore the determining factor in the present and future of their country." It is clear they have been dominated by the town-bred "men of the Kremlin," but hope lies with them. It is a long way to Tipperary, but longer still to Sosnofka.

SHANE LESLIE

## REVIEWS

### THE PAPACY IN POLITICS

*Pio Nono*, by E. E. Y. Hales (Eyre and Spottiswoode 25s).

*Prophecy and Papacy*, by Alec R. Vidler (S.C.M. Press 25s).

*Politics of Belief in Nineteenth Century France*, by Philip Spencer (Faber 25s).

"HAD THERE BEEN NO PROPHECY," said Professor H. L. Goudge in a passage quoted by Canon Vidler, "we should not care to read the story of Israel. Had there been no priesthood there would have been no story to read." *Mutatis mutandis* these words are not altogether inapplicable to Christian history. In the three works before us prophecy is represented by Lamennais and Lacordaire, by the less known Abbé Michon, and the layman Louis Veuillot; the Papacy and the priesthood by Gregory XVI and Pius IX.

Mr. Hales's biography of Pio Nono is timely. Mr. G. F. H. Berkeley and his wife have indeed already done much to inculcate a more favourable view of Pius IX's Italian policy than that which most English readers imbibed from writers among whom may be named Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco and Mr. G. M. Trevelyan. Mr. and Mrs. Berkeley's work is however confined to the first years of the pontificate. Mr. Hales surveys it as a whole, though his main interest is in Italian affairs. To the popularly accepted view that Pius IX was an irresolute, kindly and foolish man who was occasionally vain, who after for a brief period exhibiting some generous impulses became dominated by reactionary counsellors, Mr. Hales does not oppose the ultra-clerical one which made of him little if any less than a demi-god. He pays tribute to the Pope's interest in the material welfare of his States, but balances it by a severe but probably not unjust verdict on



the intellectual or rather anti-intellectual tendencies of the pontificate. "Pio Nono," he says, "cannot be acquitted of a certain ignorance and indifference towards the great writers and thinkers of his age; he was far from being a scholar, with the result that the Curia was below that level of intellectual eminence that was desirable." We are not yet far from the day when such a judgment would have appeared to many something like blasphemy. It is not of course possible to write the story of the longest pontificate in history without making some omissions. We might perhaps have wished to see included some discussion of the problem of Italian unity as a whole. For it is in the light of this problem that we must judge Pius IX's apparent conviction that papal rule over the States of the Church could be indefinitely maintained. Yet his distrust of the sincerity of the Piedmontese Government was justified. Mr. Hales does not mention in this connection the mission to Rome of Victor Emmanuel's almoner, the Abbate Stellardi. A more important omission is the absence of reference to the Mortara case, which in the opinion of many was a factor of prime importance in the disruption of the Papal States.

Pius IX became a convert to absolutism largely on account of the murder of Rossi, his political thinking after 1849 being influenced by the *Civiltà Cattolica* and Louis Veuillot. Yet it could be maintained that his distrust of moderate liberals such as Minghetti was based on reasoning not altogether sound. He believed that "behind them lurked the Mazzinis and the Garibaldis." Yet equally did the ultra-clericals lurk behind the more reasonable Catholics. What Italy needed was a government of the centre in which Catholic support and co-operation would relieve the moderate liberals from dependence on the extremists. Mr. Hales has a curious habit of spelling "Liberal Catholic" with a hyphen like "Anglo-Catholic." This lacks justification and tells us nothing; for we do not know whether our "Liberal-Catholic" is a liberal in politics or a liberal in dogma. The author has, however, probably given us a book as free from prejudice as can be written.

Canon Vidler's theme belongs to the period immediately preceding the pontificate of Pius IX into which Lamennais survived, the centenary of his death occurring early in the present year. But the Canon is not concerned with the last twenty years of his subject's life, which were passed outside the Church. "Lamennais's governing idea or ideal," he writes, "was the social regeneration of France and, indeed, of Europe, through a renaissance of Catholicism." He desired to present the Catholic faith in such a way as to "command the intellectual respect of men in whom the acids of philosophical scepticism had done their work. . . ." There would not appear to be any proof or solid foundation for the widely held belief that Leo XII contemplated making Lamennais a Cardinal and even designated him one *in petto*.

But Canon Vidler, following Père Dudon, believes that in 1824 Leo, had the French Government not objected, would have made Lamennais a Bishop *in partibus* and encouraged him to settle in Rome. Such a step would have implied not papal approval of Lamennais's teaching, but a desire to draw him into an environment "which would moderate his enthusiasm and check his dangerous excursions into polemics." In an epilogue Lamennais's posthumous influence on Catholic thought is discussed. There has been some exaggeration in this matter but the historian Georges Goyau believed that it could not be overlooked.

Mgr. Duchesne, Lamennais's fellow-Breton, in a speech at St. Malo on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, found in the encyclicals of Leo XIII ideas which were not without a resemblance to his. More recently Jules Meinville attacked the social teaching of Jacques Maritain on the ground that it reproduced the doctrines found in *L'Avenir*. The well-known Roman theologian, Père Garrigou-Lagrange, protested against such an identification, but Meinville returned to the charge and his adversary "made what may have been the convenient discovery that he had no time to go further into the matter."

Mr. Spencer's story of the fortunes of religion in France begins on 14 February 1831 when a mob sacked the Parisian church of Saint-Germain-L'Auxerrois on the occasion of a requiem Mass for Charles X's second son, the Duc de Berri. This was looked on as a kind of political demonstration. For the *parti-prêtre* was unreconciled to the Revolution of July and to the dynastic change which it had brought about. Louis-Philippe would sometimes display an odd interest in liturgical matters and was genial in his manners with the clergy. But many priests would pray for him only under pressure, continuing to regard the exiled Charles X as their lawful king. Mgr. de Quélen, Breton and royalist of the old school, was at first suspicious of Lacordaire, but in 1835 consented to his giving eight Lenten conferences at Notre-Dame. Lamennais was now outside the Church, but Lacordaire had not lost confidence in the belief that the Catholic religion must be presented in a manner called for by the spirit of the age. Though timed to begin at 2 p.m. hearers were already in the nave at 8 a.m. The preacher abandoned the stilted manner which had characterized sermons since the time of Massillon a hundred years before. He even addressed the congregation as "Messieurs" rather than as "brethren." France seemed on the brink of a great revival of Christianity in which Europe would follow in her wake. The story of the non-realization of this hope is the theme of the latter part of the book.

If we have criticized Mr. Hales for omitting all mention of the Mortara affair, we must criticize Mr. Spencer for allowing an unwary reader to suppose that it took place not as it did at Bologna in North

Italy but at Boulogne-sur-Mer. Young Edgar Mortara was not "sent to the Pope's dominions." He was already in them.

HUMPHREY J. T. JOHNSON

## BURNS IN ENGLISH

*Burns into English*, by William Kean Seymour (Allan Wingate 12s 6d).

BY MOST ENGLISHMEN Robert Burns is taken for granted, but not read. They are quite prepared to admit that he was a great poet. They are always being told that he was. But that anyone should expect them to read him for pleasure, with one finger in the glossary at the end, and being held up at every other line by some quite incomprehensible word or phrase—frankly, no. Which typically English attitude of lazy good-nature affects the Scottish soul in a peculiarly painful way. The touch of aristocratic condescension about the you-may-be-right-my-dear-fellow approach to a matter of importance is apt in any case to rouse the Scotsman's ire (why all this "may be"?) but when it comes to an article of faith, like Burns, then it becomes more than he can bear.

Egged on, as it would appear, by some such perfervid fellow-countryman of the Bard, Mr. Seymour, himself a poet of repute, has undertaken the interesting task of translating a selection of Burns' poems into plain English as an offering "to that great body of English-speaking readers who instinctively recoil from glossaries and dictionaries." The task cannot have been an easy one. Certain Scots adjectives, for example, such as "wee" and "bonnie" the translator rightly allows to stand as being sufficiently anglicized by use and wont; the noun "quean" denoting "girl" he likewise allows to remain, possibly quite rightly too as, for all I know, it may be an English word, at any rate it does not appear in Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary. But what about "cutty sark"? Well, that frankly is an insurmountable difficulty. In the first place (except as the name of a famous yacht—and that does not get us any further; "Iolaire" is the name of many yachts, but who knows that it is the Gaelic word for "eagle"?) the words mean nothing to the average English reader and therefore call for translation: but in the second place whatever is substituted must have a rhyme to "dark" in the following line. For the next line is the dramatic keystone to the whole arch of the poem (*Tam o' Shanter*):—

And in an instant all was dark.

There is obviously nothing for it; "cutty sark" had to remain. A foot-

note giving an English translation was the most that any reasonable man or woman could have asked for.

Rhymes in general are an added difficulty. Not that Burns was himself particular in the matter of rhymes; a vague assonance was as often as not as much as he attempted. But take the opening stanza of *To a Mouse*:

Wee, glossy, cowering, timorous beastie,  
O what a panic's in thy breastie.

How is your Englishman, faint, I take it, but still pursuing, to pronounce that? "Breestie" would be the Scots way, and would also rhyme; "bresty" would not rhyme and would be moreover an oddly un-English diminutive.

But to return to *Tam o' Shanter*, which is, after all, the masterpiece and with which Mr. Seymour has dealt very successfully on the whole. There are here one or two points that call for criticism. Mr. Seymour has been guilty of a misapprehension of the meaning of a word in line 4 which, as Burns wrote it, runs:

and folk begin to tak' the gate.

This means people are on the move, are beginning to take the road, a meaning which is lost in the English version: "and folk begin to quicken gait." The word "gate" in the Scots tongue means a "street" or a "way," not a "gate" (which is "port") and still less "gait," for which I doubt if there is any equivalent word at all.

Then in the catalogue of horrors on exhibition inside Alloway Kirk there is the knife:

the grey hairs yet stuck to the horn.

Why "horn"? It is true that Burns uses "heft" for "haft," but would it not have been better to have kept the original and, forfeiting the rhyme, to have substituted the English noun, thus:

Whom his own son of life bereft,  
The gray hairs yet stuck to the haft"?

Finally I miss the intimate touch about the young lady's linen (or lack of it):

braw white seventeen hunder linen.

Fine, eighty-year-old linen, a rarity and a treasure, and the very reference throwing an interesting light on contemporary *mœurs*. And in place of this we get:

... white as finest bishop's lawn.

Which, with its suggestion of episcopacy, the Upper House, and such-like irrelevancies, is translation with a vengeance!

Mr. Seymour has not tackled the songs to any great extent, but he has at least performed one task of considerable importance. He has produced a purely English version of *Auld Lang Syne*. The "gowans," to which Mr. Micawber so flippantly objected, become "daisies," while the "guid-willie waught," that major shibboleth, disappears altogether. So that in future the spectacle of Englishmen crossing hands and singing they know not quite what in an atmosphere of mild post-prandial bewilderment need no longer present itself.

But there is another and a no less famous song, *Ca' the yowes tae the knowes*—in dealing with which it must be admitted that the translator has not been so successful.

Call the ewes to the knolls  
Call them mid' the heather bells,  
Call them where the wild brook rolls.

Quite. Even the best of us cannot hope to hit the bulls-eye every time.

JOHN MCEWEN

## A HINT OF GLORY

*Anarchy and Order*, by Herbert Read (Faber 16s).

THIS COLLECTION of Sir Herbert Read's writings on anarchism, over the last sixteen years, offers an occasion for some general remarks on the way in which the distinguished poet and critic has understood that unpopular politic.

The first of his apologies for this cause was the volume *Poetry and Anarchism*, published in 1938 at the tail-end of the economic doldrums. Its principal contentions were that the expansive development of art requires an "open" society and the freedom to elaborate an aesthetic unimpeded by the constraints of a political ideology. This work was followed in 1940 by a pamphlet, *The Philosophy of Anarchism*, in which Sir Herbert attempted to ground his notion upon the *Jus Gentium* or Law of Nature. In 1945 there came—as one of the essays in his *Coat of Many Colours*—*The Paradox of Anarchism*, which distinguished between State Socialism (deriving from Rousseau's concept of popular elective sovereign-power) and Sir Herbert's idea of the anarchist way as one of devolutional democracy. In 1949 he published the short book, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, a pregnant, only partly-worked mine. The essence of this last was, that there is a distinction between the Marxist attitude to matter, and that of the other two schools: the



first taking it for the final reality, the latter two considering it as something to be *transcended* by consciousness. But whereas existentialism effects a negative and pessimistic transcendence, anarchism responds in an optimistic fashion. For the former, the vision of the world is one of *angst* or "nothingness": for the latter, it implies a resonance of wonder.

From these brief summaries it will be seen that anarchism, for Sir Herbert, is more than a matter of planning and action. Besides containing an economic system and (to the present reviewer) a generous though sketchy body of ethics, its philosophy seems chiefly prized by the critic for the *mystique* which it offers.

This is made the clearer in the present volume, where, in a new introductory essay on *Revolution and Reason*, Sir Herbert unashamedly admits that the "politics of the absurd" is a fairly accurate description of his beliefs. To write thus, it is necessary to be possessed of faith ("the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"); and if we understand this writer's politics as holding for him a pure religious promise, we shall find ourselves, often enough, able to rejoice with him over his "absurdities," even though we may reject his "reasons." "The task of the anarchist philosopher," he writes, "is not to prove the imminence of a Golden Age, but to justify the value of believing in its possibilities." It is this sentiment of the ideal which anarchism has always preserved above all other revolutionary politics. That, in itself, gives no guarantee of its civic workability. Its ethics, again, are a shaky matter (too near, perhaps, to the Sermon on the Mount for man, without grace, to hope to observe them); but in its Utopian passion and imagery there is something noble, something which appeals to the imagination—if only on paper—like the *Republic* of Plato or Campanella's *City of the Sun*. All this, Sir Herbert frequently conveys, especially in his series of *pensées* under the title of *Chains of Freedom*, which first appeared in *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, and is republished here in supplemented form.

DEREK STANFORD

### SALUTE TO ADVENTURERS

*Clubland Heroes*, by Richard Usborne (Constable 15s).

THE CLUBLAND HEROES are the clean-limbed gentlemen populating the novels of Buchan, Sapper and Yates, who by dint of keeping themselves in first-rate physical condition are enabled to travel vast distances on desperate adventures before returning to the sanctuary of their clubs. On these adventures they speak a jargon

which was doubtless familiar at the time it was written but now comes strangely to the ear ("You are a high class of sportsman, Dogson, and have arrived in the nick of time"), and the behaviour of the characters, though praiseworthily active, is at times unruly ("With a last spasm of fury he hurled the wretched Zadowa into a corner and left him lying there; then his iron self-control came back to him"). Moreover the great code of schoolboy ethics which binds the heroes together is for us, the children of an atomic age, disappointingly imprecise. "Gaudian was clearly a good fellow, a white man and a gentleman. I could have worked with him, for he belonged to my own totem." And so on, through innumerable quotations. But the curious thing is that though we may pick up these novels today with our tongue in our cheek, prepared to enjoy their interesting turns of speech in a somewhat cynical and patronizing way, we soon find ourselves becoming as excited as ever we were at those wild pursuits over moorland and mountain. For these men, Buchan, Sapper and Yates, were masters of their craft, and all of us who rest addicted to their books will remain everlastingly grateful to Mr. Usborne for his masterly portraits of their chief characters.

Of the three writers Mr. Usborne confesses he rates Buchan third. I wonder why? Fosse, he says, he could recognize, but Hannay not. But surely Hannay is as real a man as Fosse a place, if anything too much of a recognizable type. Buchan's characters, it is true, are seldom two-dimensional in the sense of having inward thoughts and eccentricities of their own, but then they would not have been true to themselves (let alone of use for the purpose for which the author intended them) if they had been anything but the most cut-and-dried and extroverted figures. It is only at the end of the Buchan saga (in *Sick Heart River*), when Buchan himself was entering a different world, that his favourite character, Edward Leithen, underwent that remarkable change. It is a change which makes us think that Buchan himself, had he lived, would have responded to the events of our own time in a way that would have made him a truly great writer.

But these dark thoughts should not be allowed to interfere with the reader's enjoyment of Mr. Usborne's most excellent and amusing book. I am sure that the next time Hannay waves to Roylance across the club he will be seen to be reading his copy of it.

JOHN POELS

## PERSONAL ODYSSEY

*Living Christianity*, by Michael de la Bedoyere (Burns and Oates 15s).

THE AUTHOR OF THIS EXCELLENT BOOK is not quite certain, one understands, whether "living" in his title is to be taken as an adjective or a participle, whether he is describing how Christianity is to be made vital or whether he is telling the story of how he himself has tried to live Christianity. In any case, the point of the book remains the same; it is a description of how one person, through a somewhat unusual personal history—for it remains unusual to have spent some ten years in a religious order before re-entering "the world," adopting another profession, marrying, becoming, in fact, a layman—has come to an appreciation of the rich spiritual significance of what he first learnt as a moral, doctrinal, disciplinary and devotional system. In his own case, this system has flowered into a many-sided and many-splendoured reality, a personal religion expressing itself in a profound awareness of God as perfection abidingly realized, revealed in Christ who, through His Church, perpetuates that work of redemption and sanctification which is so much more intimate and personal than any merely external "life of devotion."

All that the author has to say of the inner meaning of the Church's teaching is important and timely. His book must be cordially recommended to all who are seeking to reach the heart of the Christian matter, who are dissatisfied with the sterile and wearisome round of pious practices which is their religious life, who desperately want to deepen their awareness of God, their appreciation of the Incarnation, their love of the Church, not as bureaucratic machine, but as Mystical Body.

Running through his treatment, though nowhere stated explicitly, is the suggestion that it ought to be possible to devise some technique to guarantee that a far larger number of Catholics shall come to a similar understanding of the inwardness of their faith. Yet it may well be doubted whether this is, in fact, possible. Whilst it is true that parents and individual teachers can do more than they often do by personal example to help on the growth of a religious attitude of mind, in the end the mystery of the interaction between divine grace and individual freedom eludes analysis. Why should the brothers of Stanislaus and Aloysius—to take two examples out of a host—who presumably had much the same "opportunities" as the saints themselves, have turned out the reverse of saintly? Heaven knows, complacency about our methods of religious education is to be shunned, and all the time we must be devising new approaches to a subject so important. But in the end, the responsibility remains that of the individual soul. Count de la Bedoyere has made much more of his

opportunities than many others, but is he perhaps not projecting his present intuitions and awarenesses into an earlier stage of development, implying that, had his training been different he might have reached his present stage in early years? But, as Aristotle holds that moral philosophy is no subject for the young, so, as a general rule, it is probable that a maturity of mind and experience is necessary for a full appreciation of the essence of Christianity. And it is quite conceivable that, in another ten or fifteen years, he may come to be dissatisfied with what he writes today.

But it would be intolerable to end with the suggestion that we are or could be dissatisfied. We can have nothing but gratitude for a stimulating and most illuminating treatment of the most important of all possible themes.

THOMAS CORBISHLEY

## SHORTER NOTICES

*The Golden Honeycomb*, by Vincent Cronin (Hart-Davis 16s).

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT SICILY, but it is as pleasurable to read almost as much for the author's sake as because of the place. It is delightful to meet a writer so responsive to the beautiful or the strange; so eager to disentangle (without vulgarizing it) the intricate; so respectful of what most tamed northerners might consider crude; so able to detect that there *is* mystery behind so brilliant a scene and within a people so simply prepared for joyous noise, for forthright talkativeness. (How horrified an English preacher would be if his audience interrupted him "to contest or approve"; and how very good for him it would, quite often, be.) Mr. Cronin advances into Sicily not just as an enthusiastic tourist (or as one rather sheepishly on his guard lest he be taken in by foreigners), nor equipped with antiquarian theories or well thought-out travel-plans, but equipped with a Quest, not for the Grail but for the golden honey-comb which Daedalus is said to have made as a grateful *ex voto* to the Aphrodite of Eriké. Well, the centuries may have squashed it flat or it may have been looted or never have existed, but a honey-comb is in every way a charming thing to look at or think about and it quite rightly flickers in and out of Mr. Cronin's mind as he watches buildings, mosaics, the lights and shadows upon rocks, or just reflects on what may underlie the ruins due to earthquakes or to Etna. He takes us to all the show-places, quite rightly, because most people have not been to Sicily, and when they have, have not done more than stare, whereas Mr. Cronin looks *into* things, and he has assimilated an immense

amount of history and can evoke ghosts from pre-Christian times as well as from almost every century of our era. Would that he could, not exorcise, but de-substantiate the blatancies that Fascism has left behind it. We would have liked many more photographs especially of the Sicily that he has penetrated as the tourist has not: and we would have liked more about Etna and even about Stromboli which, at its frequent best, is more convincing than Etna's lazy plume: it leaves you in no doubt about man's precarious walk over the crust of this planet, which perhaps we are to realize better by death raining from the skies than by the uproarings of incandescent gas through such volcanic chimneys that remain.

*One*, by David Karp (Gollancz 12s 6d).

A PLAY, *The Prisoner*, by Miss Boland, recently made a deep impression: it showed how a Cardinal's personality could apparently be broken down without torture or drugs. Mr. Karp describes a still more dreadful experiment—the substitution of a totally new personality for the victim's original one: true, he makes use of drugs, but no physical torture. Professor Burden's work was to send detailed reports of conversations he might hear or sights he might witness to the State Department of Internal Examination, and he had done this for ten years at the rate of at least a thousand words a day. He had to denounce anything that smelt even slightly of heresy. At last he was himself summoned to the Special Service Detail Office, and he went, hoping to receive some recognition for work well done. Alas, that in itself proved him to be unconsciously a heretic. He felt he was an individual, a "person," and had a separate value. A deep psychic treatment might have sufficed to destroy this profoundly anti-State mentality, which, had it been multiplied among many, would naturally have reduced the State to chaos; but a bold experimentalist, Mr. Lark, obtains leave not only to reduce Burden to a mere shell of his original self, but to turn him into someone quite different. The treatment is exhaustively described; and in the end Professor Burden is ready to become Mr. Hughes. (To account for his disappearance, a corpse sufficiently like him is produced and duly buried in the presence of his heart-broken wife and two young sons.) Unluckily, the experiment is not quite successful: Hughes retains the vestiges of an independent self. Lark confesses himself beaten *this* time, but is determined to "go on trying." Meanwhile he telephones to the Medical Division announcing that Hughes's execution is to take place at 4.00 a.m. on 7 January: "Will you kindly arrange for death by embolism?" As at the beginning of the book, so at the end, Hughes (once Burden) is summoned to a State office, and goes hoping to be congratulated for



his good behaviour while sick. But it is the order for his execution that is read to him.

We think that the part of the book dealing with "Hughes" is too short compared with the chapters describing the earlier existence and then the attempted destruction of "Burden." Or rather, the first part may seem to wish to describe every possible variety of the torment the helpless man is subjected to, and so be too long-drawn. But these ghastly pages undoubtedly show how a State can set about conditioning a man till he thinks only its thoughts, wills what it wills, acknowledges as reality only what it tells him, and the human pulp into which he is merged is real. The book is far more thoughtful than *Brave New World* or even Orwell's 1989, and more dreadful than Mr. Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* because the drama here is entirely mental with the minimum of stage-setting.

*Petrus Borel the Lycanthrope*, by Enid Starkie (Faber 21s).

SINCE Mr. Peter Quennell's classic *Baudelaire and the Symbolists* appeared in 1929 much scholarship has been devoted to the obscure byways of French literature. None has been more assiduous in this direction than Dr. Starkie, whose latest book presents a portrait of an age rather than a portrait of one man. Indeed, the right of Borel to a full-length biography may be questioned, but the author justifies her work by introducing us to the fascinating world of Paris in the time of Charles X and Louis-Philippe, the world of dandies and bouzingsos, the *petit cénacle*, and the battle of *Hernani*.

Revolutionary groups are much the same in any age and in any place, but in the Paris of the 1830's they were, if possible, just a little more insane, a little more innocuous, a little more colourful. But not, one is forced to conclude, a little more brilliant. The attitude of revolt, the "Werewolf" school, which distinguished the extreme Romantics of the period was to lead to nothing more than the great Decadence. There were, however, some eccentrics of genius, among them Gérard de Nerval and Théophile Gautier, while Victor Hugo, the archpriest of French Romanticism, apostatized from their ranks.

Their leader was Petrus Borel, whose qualities of macabre fantasy and defiance established him as a precursor of Baudelaire, Lautréamont and the Surrealists. His contribution to Surrealism may have been exaggerated, and Dr. Starkie makes little of it, as she makes little of Sade's influence on Borel. His published works are unlikely to be known to more than one Englishman in a million. Nor is this surprising. *Champavert* and *Madame Putiphar* are horrific productions resembling the English Gothick romances of a few decades earlier, slightly more shocking perhaps, and certainly inferior to Poe's tales.

His importance lies simply in his momentary influence on a greater artist—Baudelaire. His end as a prematurely bald Civil Servant in Algeria may have been anti-climax, but was not entirely unexpected.

*Thunder on St. Paul's Day*, by Jane Lane (Robert Hale 10s 6d).

MISS LANE achieves her success in historical novels by the hard way. She does not write a modern love or crime story, and then switch her characters into period costume. She works out what really happened in the past with such exactitude of time and place that she is able to say: this is how an imaginary character would have acted under these circumstances. In this novel the real persons and events of the Titus Oates Plot are woven into those of an imagined Catholic family without any awkward break between them. There is just one place that creaks faintly: a parenthesis about Danby's motives which reads more like a hasty essay than a careful story. And there is just one minute error: it was Sir Henry Gage (an old St. Omer's boy), not George Gage, who commanded the King's forces at Oxford in the Civil War.

The title (taken from a bit of weather-lore by Gervase Markham) expresses admirably the atmosphere which she conveys of the sickening tension and terror of those months in the familiar scenes of London. The execution of the Jesuits at Tyburn is finely described; but even finer perhaps is the reconstruction of the trial scene: the boy-witnesses pressed by the crowd against the outside door, and the breath of the court-house that strikes them in the face as they enter. A particular charm is added to this book of Miss Lane's by the St. Omer's school-boy whose evidence helps to restore decent people to sanity. His relations with his mother are worked out with a truth and pathos that, for a moment or two, lifts this book into the rank of the really great historical novels.

*A Handbook to the Life and Times of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross* by E. Allison Peers (Burns and Oates 21s).

THIS BOOK (which has a Catholic *imprimatur*) was actually in the press at the time of Professor Allison Peers's untimely and lamented death. It is what it professes to be—a Handbook. Part I contains a straightforward, undecorated history of the Discalced Carmelite Reform: Part II consists of outline-biographies of the principal persons mentioned in or connected with the writings of the two saints: Part III contains a list of the Houses founded between 1562 and 1594; another list of places of importance figuring in the lives of the Founders; and finally a very valuable conspectus, in three parallel

columns, of the chief events in the lives of St. Teresa and St. John, and in Carmelite history in general. The book, therefore, chronicles sufficiently the history of the Teresian Reform, without explaining the else-incredible behaviour of persons who professed "religion" in its highest sense. But for this we look to the volumes earlier published which have made us for ever indebted to the work of Professor Allison Peers.

*God, Man and the Universe*, edited by J. de Bivort de la Saudée (Burns and Oates, 35s).

*The Triptych of the Kingdom*, edited by Rev. J. Greenwood (Sands, 15s).

THESE TWO BOOKS cover much the same ground, but their aim and method are different. In his introduction to the former, the editor reminds us that the several chapters are "A Christian answer to Modern Materialism," and that probably the dividing line between Communist materialism and the Christian Faith is not nearly so sharply drawn here as in Latin Europe. That is true: we are seldom aware of our under-mind; the average Englishman is slow to believe that Russian Communism has a perfectly clear anti-religious philosophy because he himself has no clear religious creed. Hence he can take no decisive step, whereas his enemy strides forward almost unopposed. After a preliminary chapter on the existence of God by Professor Dondeyne of Louvain, a chapter on the origin and structure of the world follows, by Dr. A. Romaña, Director of the Ebro Observatory at Tortosa; others, on the origin of Life, and of Man; then comes Dr. Messenger's on Man's origin as told in Genesis: had he lived, he could, we think, have been still more affirmative. Dr. Ternus of Frankfurt writes of the nature of the Soul; and Fr. de Lubac, of the origin of Religion. We pass then to more familiar ground—Christianity at its origin and in its development, with a special chapter on the origin of the "Reformation," others on Religion and Progress, the Church in the Age of Capitalism (by Mr. Woodruff); Dialectical Materialism (by G. A. Witter, professor at the Oriental Institute, Rome) and the Problem of Evil, by Fr. Congar. We think it certain that not as many as should will be able to assimilate—and afford—this book, and that for it to receive the study which its exceptional value deserves those Study-Circles which have so often been asked for *must* be formed.

The plan of the second book reinforces this desire. Dr. Van Doornik, Fr. S. Jelsma and Fr. A. Van de Lisdonk, its authors, work in Holland under the auspices of the "Una Sancta" movement. That is, they seek to make converts. Applicants for instruction can receive it in a private house, and from a layman, if they prefer: they can continue as long as they like. If a shop is used, it is called "The Open Door"—we too

envisage a set of three rooms: a library opening on to the street; a room where preliminary inquiries may be made; and a room where instruction may be fully given—yes, and with facilities for tea! We think such a place is actually contemplated. This book, making the “psychological” approach to a full account of the teaching of the Church and of life in the Church, witnesses to and explains the amazing success of the “Una Sancta House” at The Hague. True, the scientific prolegomena, by experts, found in the previous volume, are not included here, but few save specialists, after all, would appreciate them. Messrs. Sands have produced a volume for which they must be congratulated: we have noticed no misprints, whereas in the book first reviewed we have the unusual “Barco-Kheba” (p. 230 n.); Guigenbert (p. 250); Pastalian (p. 419); etc.: and “pretends” is an invariable mistranslation of “prétend” (p. 317); and where the colour-bar is the subject, South Africa should at least be mentioned (pp. 318 ff).

*The Church and Infallibility*, by B. C. Butler, Abbot of Downside (Sheed and Ward 12s 6d).

RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY is once more in fashion, but for the ten or more Salmonian dissuasives from Popery which have appeared since the war there is but this one reply from the Catholic side. The Abbot of Downside has taken the arguments of Salmon's attack on Papal infallibility and answered them one by one in full detail, yet with the streamlining needed by the modern reader. Salmon wrote his lectures in 1870 when he was, if not “bleeding from the Roman rods,” at least smarting under the blow of Irish disestablishment and anxious to make the most of the popular alarm which followed the definition of Papal infallibility. Ironically enough, it was largely due to another Irishman, Cardinal Cullen, that the ultimate shaping of the definition in the Council deprived Salmon of most of his case, for he had been arguing against the extravagances of W. G. Ward rather than the sober doctrine of the definition. It is certainly strange that Protestant controversy finds nothing better than Salmon to use at the present day. Salmon had the clear mind of a mathematician and a wide reading in the Fathers, but the great advances in patristic scholarship since 1870, when he wrote, and 1889, when he published, his lectures make his work seem very inadequate today. One has only to look at what he says of Clement of Rome to see this. The last few chapters of Clement's epistle were unknown to scholars until 1875, and as these chapters show a much more authoritarian tone than the earlier part of the letter the view one must take of the letter as a whole is inevitably modified by them; but Salmon obviously found it hard to change his mind once it was made up. Abbot Butler

has dealt very adequately with all these shortcomings in his author and has provided an effective refutation of his case. His concluding chapter merits attention even from those who have no interest in the detail of the argument, for there the Abbot steps back to view the Church as a living reality rather than as the conclusion of an argument. It is this, and the hint from Soloviev (given on p. 125) that a Church is only safe from state-control if it have a centre of unity outside the power of that government, which will provide the most weighty arguments for the modern mind which is not tied to any form of historical Protestantism.

*George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, by Joseph H. Summers (Chatto and Windus 21s).

*Four Metaphysical Poets*, by Joan Bennett (Cambridge University Press 15s).

READERS of Professor Summers's earlier articles on Herbert and on Marvell must have been looking forward to his new book, and they will not be seriously disappointed. Its only real fault is that it is not long enough: well under 200 pages, apart from Appendices and Notes. The broad truths about Herbert's poetry and religion are ably set forth, with timely warnings against attempts to press him into the service of a specifically Laudian Anglo-catholicism, and what the author calls his "disciplined richness" is well illustrated. Professor Summers has an eye for the essential, and his book never gives the impression, as Miss Tuve's sometimes does, of a display of erudition for its own sake. But once Herbert has been set in perspective, there is much to be done in the way of close and detailed analysis, and what the author gives us in this direction (e.g., on "Church-monuments") is so perceptive and careful that we inevitably ask for more. Still, any reader of this book will have been put on the right track, and will read Herbert with deepened appreciation.

Mrs. Bennett's rather expensive little book is not quite as much needed as when it first appeared in 1934. The revision is not as careful as it might have been: Donne's year of birth is still given as 1573 (known to be wrong already in 1934) and even the slip by which Martin's *Crashaw* was stated to be in two volumes is uncorrected. But as an introductory survey the book still has its uses, and will lead no one very far astray.



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